

Youth-Initiatives: Learn to Earn

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Abstract

In early 2001, the Citizens League Board of Directors established a committee to examine the alarmingly low high school graduation rate of students in the Minneapolis and Saint Paul school systems. The report, *A Failing Grade for School Completion, We Must Increase School Completion in Minneapolis and Saint Paul* states:

Statewide school completion rates remain high in Minnesota; however our core cities continue to lose an unacceptable proportion of students, especially students of color, before graduation. People without a high school education are unlikely to earn a family living wage. An economy short on labor cannot afford to leave anyone behind. The youth that disappear from our schools can show up in the criminal justice and social service systems (Chadwick & Wray, 2001).

A follow-up report discovered Minnesota has an increasing percentage of minority and low-income students with inadequate or uneven educational achievement in high school. Over 30 percent of high school graduates needed remedial classes to begin post-secondary education and in the past ten years, the percentage of higher education graduates has dropped by 7 percent (Citizens League, 2004).

How can this be occurring in a state where almost 90 percent of the population is a high school graduate (U S Census Bureau 2000)? Why are we failing our inner-city minority and immigrant students, who represent a rapidly growing portion of the population? Why are thirty-four percent of Minneapolis youth not graduating from high school in four years? Why are 37 to 70 percent of the students who do graduate, taking remedial college classes (McKinsey & Company, Inc, 2007, p. 4)?

Apparently, Minneapolis is not the only city or state facing this dilemma. In 2005, nearly 20 percent of Black Americans, 18 years and older had not completed high school, compared to 11 percent of White youth, ages 18 years and older (U. S. Census Bureau, 2005). Why is a rich nation, such as ours, failing this generation of low-income, minority and immigrant kids?

In the Twin Cities, hundreds and maybe thousands of organizations—foundations, governments, schools, faith-based organizations, non-profit and for-profit groups—are working to reverse this trend. My Master's Project contributed to this larger effort. It built upon the notion that *knowledge is power* by supplying a critical and often missing component of power, *information*. More specifically, I conducted a survey that found that many people were unaware of the Minneapolis Teen Job Fair, already in its third year; and I did other research that revealed that most households and even some city staff were unaware of several key summer youth education and employment opportunities. This led me to assist selected Minneapolis non-profits working with teens by providing them with summer youth employment information.

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Executive Summary

Working with numerous youth-oriented organizations, Minneapolis, Minnesota is working to aggressively tackle an elusive academic problem: an expanding number of minority students dropping out of high school and not pursuing additional academic education. If *knowledge is power*, then supplying a critical and often missing component of power, *information* can be a KEY to turning this situation around. This concept is being used to turn around an escalating decline in academic achievement amongst urban minority students. This project was designed to work with several minority-led non-profit organizations working with lower income minority-youth in North Minneapolis, providing these non-profits with a student volunteer, who is also a parent of teen-agers and a City employee. My task was to provide these organizations with youth-oriented research, potential funding opportunities and connections to other youth programs operating in the larger community.

A big challenge working on this project is that while the community and various youth organizations were willing to accept information from me and NorthWay allowed me to sit in a couple of the Youth Leadership Training sessions, I couldn't have direct contact with any of the youth without written permission from their parents. In one of my meetings with Ms. E. B. Brown, she really stressed how important it is to ensure you have written parental permission. Regardless of how good a parent they are, or are not, parents are ultimately responsible for their children and we have to respect this (Brown, Oasis Director, 2008).

A new initiative that grew out of the Minneapolis Park Board system was the Minneapolis Youth Congress, comprised of 55 youth located throughout Minneapolis and governed by the Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board. Youth who are interested in participating complete an application, writing a brief essay about themselves, why they are interested, and if there is a specific issue they would like to work on. Selected candidates cannot already be involved in other academic or extra-curricular activities, which is intentional. The general idea is to engage teens and young adults who typically don't participate in group projects. This initiative gives inner-city youth an opportunity to "voice" what activities and events they want, instead of having well-meaning librarians, educators, and park administrators determine what youth-programs to offer (Jenkins, 2008). Allowing youth to make these determinations, was a major first step to providing positive, safe and educational alternatives that youth wanted and would participate in. Plus, providing learning opportunities that teens find interesting, will expand their outlook and change the attitudes of these, unheard and/or forgotten youth. Giving youth access to tools, resources and information, the Youth Congress engages teens with an opportunity to be a part of the solution. This provides them with a better understanding and appreciation of the broader problems affecting the community as a whole and youth living in the community.

A primary emphasis of several youth-oriented non-profits was to give youth permission to speak with a voice that is "heard" by adults in control: politicians, educators, and parents. Unfortunately, many adults discount young voices, by not truly "listening" to them. At an early

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morning breakfast meeting held in April 2008, two Youth Congress leaders spoke to Minneapolis residents to inform the community about the activities they were involved in and how young individuals were working with the City to make a difference. Several minority adults in the room told these young leaders that they didn't understand how things really worked in the world and that nothing would change, especially, without City funding for existing programs.

Unfortunately, old habits—using confrontation and coercion tactics— die hard for some minority adults as several former City-initiated programs did not produced the results initially promised. However, working with numerous youth-oriented non-profits, the city hopes to turn this progression around, working with the business community offering summer employment opportunities, youth leadership skills and paying for the first two-years of post-secondary school for public high school graduates.

Too often, under-employed, poverty-stricken parents are over-whelmed just trying to make ends meet and don't really listen to their children—as their minds wander while their children are talking. Many of these parents lack the time or ability to find low-cost, age appropriate, youth-oriented programs for their active teenagers. Through my research efforts, I created a list of quality summer internships and activities—many that were specifically designed for minority youth. Having a trusted non-profit youth-oriented organization provide parents and teens with this list was an important first task. Without this information too many Minneapolis teens are idle, sitting at home—bored with nothing to do, during the summer months. This comment surfaced from several teens, who participated in the City of Minneapolis partnership with Emerge-MN when asked about their summer experience. Teens employed over the 2008 summer months in the Emerge-MN StreetWerks stated, “. . . their involvement helped them learn how to work with others and gave them a new sense of concern for the neighborhood. Some said they learned how to look at the long-term importance and consequences of the choices they make” (NorthWay Community Trust, 2008).

. . . to be successful, everyone must be constantly learning. It is clear that knowledge is most important for sustaining competitive advantage. Because half of what you know will be outdated in approximately three years, and the amount of knowledge available to the average person doubles about every three years, learning is a prerequisite for a productive life. If people stop learning, they quickly become outdated and out of touch. Life-long learning is a key requirement, therefore, to successful living . . . (David A. Whetton, p. 69)

Another connection that appeared to be missing was the Minneapolis Teen Job Fair, sponsored by the City of Minneapolis and the business community. Initially, held in 2007 at the North Regional Library in North Minneapolis, the Teen Job Fair was attended by over 500 youth and their parents. The organizers of the event were pleased with the overwhelming number of attendees at this initial kick-off event. To accommodate more participants, the job fair was moved to the newly constructed downtown library. On January 5, 2008 over 1,000 youth and their parents attended the second Minneapolis Teen Job Fair. Youth interested in summer employment through the Minneapolis Employment and Training Program (METP) were given applications to complete and encouraged to apply before the application deadline of January 11,

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2008. However, based on surveys conducted in February, 2008 very few North Minneapolis residents were aware or even attended this event (surveys attached as appendix B).

In a March, 2008 telephone conversation with METP staff, coordinating the STEP-UP program, I asked why the job fair and application deadline is in January—months before other youth programs announce summer programs. Staff indicated they start the process in October, sending out over 300 employer applications requesting a summer youth employment opportunity is created (Fischer, 2008). METP pays the wages of the young workers provided to the employers. In turn, the employers provide a safe worksite and supporting documentation to the city. Staff stated these activities require a lot of lead time, initially working with employers and then subsequently with teens to ensure a successful partnership and opportunity is established. Although, city staff continues to accept STEP-up applications through April, they cannot guarantee these youth a summer job. Staff typically refers these late applicants to other City-funded projects that employ youth, such as StreetWerks, Teen teamworks, YouthCare, Cookie Cart and so on. In 2007, STEP-UP provided 2,053 Minneapolis youth with summer jobs (Fischer, 2008). Staff also indicated the program is only available to residents of Minneapolis as Minnesota Representative Linda Higgins secured \$1.9 million in state funding, specifically for this program (Fischer, 2008).

So another focus of this project was to increase awareness and subsequently attendance of North Minneapolis youth and their parents to the 2009 Teen Job Fair, as this one event could open opportunities for many young individuals. First, we needed to make sure all of the non-profit organizations in North Minneapolis received advance notice of this important event in 2009.

One of several goals of the NorthWay Community Trust's Youth Leadership training was to have more North Minneapolis teens actively involved with the Youth Congress. Unfortunately, due to budget cuts, NorthWay's Outreach Manager, was laid-off the end of October, 2008. Eliminating the opportunity to follow-up with the fifty-seven 2008 graduates of its leadership program and determine how many attended the first Minneapolis Youth Convention held October 28, 2008 or track how many submitted an application to participate on the board of the Youth Congress (Knuckles, 2009). Youth Congress applications for new leaders were due December 16, 2008.

The 2007-08 foreclosure housing crisis and the subsequent downturn of the overall economy hit the North Minneapolis neighborhoods extremely hard. Many families renting single family homes were surprised by the Sheriff, serving them eviction papers. Hundreds of families suddenly found themselves homeless, as property owners stopped making mortgage payments, while still collecting payments from the renters. With increased unemployment, rising fuel and food expenses, many summer jobs traditionally held by teens were already filled by older adults working part-time to make ends meet. This was especially problematic for many young adults who waited until May or June to begin searching for a summer job (ROSENBLUM, 2008).

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Yet according to a recent article, the housing crisis may have been a blessing in disguise as many problematic tenants and owners were affected more by foreclosures, providing this community with a potentially unique opportunity to begin rebuilding (Mannix, 2009).

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Community Needs Assessment

“Today’s young people are the most valuable generation Minneapolis has ever raised. As we strive to prosper in a global economy where markets are created and shaped by increasingly diverse peoples, the students in Minneapolis—who speak 100 languages and come from all around the world—are the key to our competitiveness.” (City of Minneapolis, 2008, p. 4) So how do we, as citizens in a global economy, actively engage and encourage our inner-city minority youth to lead productive lives, when a lot of what they see and are exposed to is poverty, violence, drug abuse, racism, and destruction?

When you grow up in poor neighborhoods and . . . you see all these drug dealers, or even gangbangers, with these nice cars and everything . . . all this jewelry, you know how they’re getting it. And you know that’s an easy way for you to get it . . . therefore, you get it. You get into that [drug dealing] so . . . you can have the money. And a lot of them do it, so that way their parents don’t have to work so much . . .

Quote from a 24-year-old Black female, Black Youth Study (University of Chicago, 2007).

If you do not mind cold weather and snow for six to eight months out of the year, Minnesota is a great state to live and work. Located in the upper Midwestern section of the United States, Minnesota has a diverse economic base with employment opportunities throughout the region with a “long history of regional thinking and an egalitarian spirit” (Sohmer, Jackson, Katz, Liu, & Warren, 2005). Minnesota offers its residents an eclectic array of recreational activities with its numerous parks and abundant lakes scattered throughout the state, supporting a large rural tourism industry. In Money magazine’s April 2008 issue, three cities in Minnesota: Minneapolis, Rochester, and Saint Cloud, made its “100 Best Places to Live and Launch” as cities “with the best mix of business advantages and lifestyle appeal” (Minneapolis Star Tribune, 2008). According to the U. S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey Data Profile of Minnesota, over 71 percent of the overall population is employed. The leading employment industries are education, health care, social assistance, and manufacturing. In addition, over 90 percent of the population are high school graduates; 30 percent have a Bachelor’s degree; with a mere 9 percent who have not graduated from high school. Minnesota ranks 44th nationally, with only 6.5 percent of the families with incomes below the poverty level in comparison to 9.8 percent nationally (U S Census Bureau 2000). Based on this information, Minnesota has a highly-educated population with a low poverty level.

Unfortunately, this perspective begins to dim when you look more closely at Hennepin County’s statistics and diminishes even further after reviewing statistics about the City of Minneapolis and four of its North Minneapolis neighborhoods. Out of 87 counties located in Minnesota, Hennepin County, which is comprised of 47 cities, has the largest population at 1,116,200 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2006). According to information compiled by Hennepin County: 47 percent of the total population, age 25 and over, graduated from high school; 46.1 percent have an Associate degree or higher; 39.1 percent have a Bachelor’s degree or higher (Hennepin County,

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Minnesota, 2003). Hennepin County's high school graduation rate is slightly more than half of the State's overall high school graduation rate of 90.7 percent.

The City of Minneapolis has the largest and most diverse population in comparison to the other 47 cities located within Hennepin County (U. S. Census Bureau, 2006). From 1990 to 2000, the City of Minneapolis gained population by almost four percent. The majority were minorities and racially diverse persons, while the White population decreased by 14 percent (City of Minneapolis, 2001). Located north of the main downtown area, the Near North Planning District of Minneapolis includes 15 different neighborhoods, many of which are separated by main thoroughfares. The neighborhoods are also separated into three different wards, which are each represented by a Council Member. As we begin to review the statistics of four North Minneapolis neighborhoods, the education, and income gaps increase even more dramatically and a pattern of poverty clearly emerges.¹

Although, the overall poverty rate for Minneapolis residents was 17 percent, the overall poverty rate for these four neighborhoods was 34 percent or twice the Minneapolis rate. The Median Family Income for Minneapolis was \$47,974 and the Metropolitan Median Income (MMI) was \$63,600. However, the average family income for these four neighborhoods was \$28,865, almost \$20,000 less than the Minneapolis median family income and about \$35,000 less than the MMI. The percentage of families below the poverty level for Minneapolis was 12 percent. The overall percentage of families whose incomes were below poverty residing in these four neighborhoods is 30 percent or almost 3 times the Minneapolis poverty rate. The average house value in Minneapolis was \$113,500. The average home value in these four neighborhoods was \$76,475 or about \$25,000 less than the Minneapolis average. (For additional information, see the comparison analysis, attached as appendix A).

This difference is even more prevalent when comparing crime statistics for the area. Although overall crime levels in 2006 for Minneapolis dropped to less than 12 percent there has been a dramatic increase in juvenile homicide victims. The majority of these occurred in the fourth precinct—North Minneapolis—a 38 percent increase. Juvenile burglary in the North Minneapolis communities rose to 63 percent, while the overall burglary rate in Minneapolis dropped to 28 percent (City of Minneapolis, 2007, pp. 2; 9-10).

There are several very dedicated North Minneapolis Youth-Oriented non-profit organizations each concentrating its efforts in North Minneapolis to reverse the escalating occurrences of violence and the ever-present pervasiveness of poverty.

Emerge-MN (Emerge) www.emerge-mn.org established in January 2006, as a separate non-profit organization is an affiliate of Pillsbury United Communities (PUC). Emerge—is a \$5.8 million non-profit organization that connects low income and/or disenfranchised residents of the Twin Cities to employment, training and housing opportunities and supports its long-term

¹ These comparisons use data compiled from the 2000 census.

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success (Emerge-MN, 2006). This organization recently consolidated its operations in a previously vacant and dilapidated building on West Broadway Avenue in North Minneapolis. In addition, Emerge partnered with Project for Pride in Living (PPL), a non-profit housing developer to create Camden Apartments, a 37-unit complex for single dads with children. According to the Executive Director, Michael Wynne they work with over 61 children.

Holding Forth the Word of Life (HFTWL) www.holdingforththewordoflife.org has been working in the North Minneapolis community for twenty-five years. This small faith-based, minority-owned organization works with minority, low-income households with children, many of whom are single female-headed households living in North Minneapolis. In 1982, HFTWL established Oasis of Love, Inc. a Crisis Intervention Center for women and their children escaping domestic abuse. Through this intervention they discovered that many of the employed families had difficulty locating quality daycare that provided appropriate programs for their minority children. In addition, many of these parents were employed in jobs with second or third shift evening hours, which only exacerbated their daycare dilemma. HFTWL established the first 24-hour Child Development Center operating in Minnesota, Agape I (and later Agape II) was established to provide low-income minority children with a safe, nurturing, quality environment, providing parents the ability to retain employment without worrying about how their children were being cared for. The Brother's Keeper Men's Network and the Hennepin County African American Men's Project Right Turn was established to provide mentoring opportunities for young minority men creating positive relationships; a non-judgmental outlet to work with other minority males against the racial issues and disparities they encounter. Kids Ending Relationship Violence (KERV) was an out-growth of the crisis intervention center. Exposed to violence in their immediate families, young women become pregnant in high school and begin repeating this cycle of violence in their own lives.

NorthWay Community Trust (NorthWay) www.northwaycom.org is a relatively new community-based non-profit organization working with all of the North Minneapolis neighborhoods. It has established several strategies to reduce and eliminate the knowledge gaps of residents by creating more community leaders; improving early childhood readiness; and improving educational opportunities for youth and adults "to prosper in a knowledge-based economy" (Northway Community Trust, 2007).

Their strategy: *Building Connections and Capacity* has established a *Neighborhood Leadership Training* initiative that provides interested and committed North Minneapolis residents with an intensive twenty-week program designed to engage more individuals from the community in public policy decisions made by local, state, and county governments that have a direct impact on their communities. Also, the program aims to create more community leaders reaching out to persons who reside, are employed, or worship in the community. Engaging, empowering and providing current community residents with the skills and information about how they can make a difference by taking advantage of and using Minneapolis programs and initiatives that are

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available to them will begin to strengthen and heal the community and its sense of place, as residents grow and expand their new found civic pride and leadership (Northway Community Trust, 2007).

Another strategy established by NorthWay is the: *Building Knowledge* initiative that seeks to improve early childhood readiness and education through collaborative and strategic partnerships and provide educational opportunities for youth and adults “to prosper in a knowledge-based economy.” Presently, the organization is establishing investment partnerships working with North Minneapolis Early Childhood Alliance (NMECA) to increase “school readiness of North Minneapolis children” (Northway Community Trust, 2006, p. 6). NorthWay is also interested in identifying additional “ways to improve post-secondary education enrollment of North Minneapolis residents.” However, due to limited staffing and resources this has been placed on the back burner (Northway Community Trust, 2007).

Plymouth Christian Youth Center (PCYC) www.pcy-cmpls.org has been in operation since 1954 and is a human service organization serving youth and families through education, community programs and community development. In 2005, this organization purchased the Capri Theatre, located off West Broadway in North Minneapolis, with the goal of restoring the theatre and bringing back the arts to this troubled community. Its mission in North Minneapolis is: “to enrich the skills, prospects and spirit of North Minneapolis area youth and adults, in partnership with families and communities” (Plymouth Christian Youth Center, 2007). Since opening its operations in 2006, this organization has established a positive presence in the community by contracting with the Minneapolis Public School system to operate an alternative high school and helping teens to graduate and continue their education.

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Problem Statement

Too many North Minneapolis residents and their children do not have access to or are not receiving quality pre-school, elementary, high school and post high school educational opportunities. These educational resources are vital to the health and well-being of the youth, young adults, and the entire Metropolitan area. This is especially significant as highly-educated and employed baby-boomers start retiring, followed by a smaller supply of workers in the next couple of generations. This means, regional employers will need to rely more on the accessible supply of workers within the Twin Cities area—women and minorities—as they look to hire younger highly-skilled workers to replace retirees.

By improving the educational opportunities for low-income minority residents, the Twin Cities region will continue its diverse economic prosperity and at the same time increase the income and wealth of minority groups. Without a readily available supply of workers from the immediate area, existing employers will begin leaving the area, reducing Minnesota's economic competitiveness. Improving quality educational opportunities for minority residents is also significant for Minneapolis as a solution for ending long-term and often intergenerational poverty. Providing opportunities for sustainable and rewarding employment that provides salaries above the federal minimum wage level must be accessible to everyone—who is willing to learn to earn. "A highly-skilled workforce is a region's most important asset. Economists have long considered "human capital"—talented people generating ideas and innovations—a crucial factor of production and a primary driver of regional economic growth" (Sohmer, Jackson, Katz, Liu, & Warren, 2005) (Glaeser, 1995, 1998, 2000).

"To be poor in America today, even more than in the past, is to be an outcast in your own country. And that, the neuroscientists tell us, is what poisons a child's brain." "American children born to parents in the bottom fourth of the income distribution have almost a 50 percent chance of staying there—and almost a two-thirds chance of remaining stuck if they're black" (Krugman, 2008). Research has consistently shown that high school graduates earn more than those students who drop out. Yet in today's economy, having a high school diploma is not enough. An individual with a high school diploma will earn \$1 million less over his life time than someone with a college degree. "Ninety-seven percent of Twin City adults earning between \$35,000 and \$79,999 have a high school degree, yet only 81 percent of low-income adults do. An associate's degree increases an individual's lifetime earnings by \$400,000" (Sohmer, Jackson, Katz, Liu, & Warren, 2005).

Research also indicates "students who spend no time in extracurricular activities, such as those offered in after-school programs, are 49 percent more likely to have used drugs and 37 percent more likely to become teen parents than are students who spend one or more hours per week in extracurricular activities. After-school programs offer youth opportunities to learn new skills such as conflict resolution, prepare for a successful career, improve grades and develop relationships with caring adults" (City of Minneapolis, 2008). Although we live in the twenty-

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first century, minority youth still lag far behind their White counterparts in academic opportunities and achievements. We can and must offer better options for inner-city minority youth. One solution is to provide access to more after-school activities and summer youth programs.

Education is the **key** to getting a better job and earning a higher income. It is a critical element to ensure low-income, unemployed, or under-employed residents can support their families above poverty levels and achieve economic sustainability. Providing financial literacy education to low-income and immigrant households is one method to ensure they are not continually preyed upon by more sophisticated and educated individuals. For example: promising female-heads of households with affordable housing that in reality is “unaffordable” due to deceptive lending and real estate practices. You have to “learn to earn” to obtain employment that provides a decent income or a living-wage, defined as more than the federal-minimum wage. Getting a summer job or paid internship is one method of learning by doing, which is both educational and beneficial on the job training. Therefore, improving education in the Twin Cities may also occur as kids participate in good summer employment opportunities.

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Project Design

To determine what Minneapolis-sponsored employment/education programs community residents were aware of, I designed a survey, and tabulated and assessed the results as a first step in this project (survey is attached as appendix B). From the 100+ surveys received, 73 percent of the respondents were unaware of Minneapolis' *Close the Gap* employment initiative. However, 67 percent were aware of the Minneapolis Employment and Training program (METP). The majority of the survey respondents indicated they use and have access to a home or work computer. Over 90 percent of the respondents agreed with this statement, "youth-violence is a problem in their community." Yet, over half were unaware of Minneapolis' Youth Violence Prevention Initiative. Those individuals, who were aware of this initiative, identified themselves as juvenile workers—probation officers, counselors, and so on. Very few respondents knew about the Minneapolis Teen Job Fair held in January, 2008 or the four-year scholarship program offered by the University of Minnesota. Clearly, indicting critical information gaps exist within the community.

This project was designed to reduce the information gap revealed by the survey—the gap between community organizations working with youth and their families in North Minneapolis neighborhoods, and the summer youth programs being offered by the larger academic and governmental communities. There are several youth-oriented organizations already working in the area, providing social service programs and housing. While there are a wealth of youth-oriented programs, connecting quality programs to the youth who need these services is a full time job all to its own.

The need is so great and varied that many of the North community organizations were already at capacity with existing day-to-day operations of programs they were already providing. Without additional financial resources or staff there isn't any time to research or explore "best practices" or other programmatic options. In an effort to provide assistance, academic studies and additional research on existing programs, was conducted and shared with NorthWay Community Trust (NorthWay), Jordan Area Community Council (JACC) and Holding Forth the Way of Life (HFTWL) staff. In addition, several new financing and program opportunities discovered were shared with these non-profit organizations. Using this information a logic model matrix was created, attached as appendix C. In return, these organizations agreed to work with me, sharing client participation and outcomes.

As indicated in the survey, very few North Minneapolis residents were aware of the teen job fair event held on January 5, 2008 at the Minneapolis downtown library. We anticipated increasing the attendance of North Minneapolis youth and their parents at this event tentatively scheduled for January 2009, by ten percent. To accomplish this task, information would be provided to Emerge, HFTWL, and NorthWay in early November and December to ensure that parents and youth set the day aside to attend this important event. In addition, all three organizations will post the Job Fair Invitation on their existing web-sites. Increasing minority youth attendance to

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this event is critical, not only for the youth, but also for the state's economy. Retaining and expanding summer employment and internships offered by existing businesses, while at the same time, exhibiting youth support for these activities and programs, creates a win-win resolution for all of Minnesota.

The *Academic Enrichment Guide 2008*, prepared by Minnesota Minority Education Partnership (MMEP), is an 80-page booklet that contains a vast list of academic programs, internships, camps and scholarship opportunities specifically geared for minority youth (Minnesota Minority Education Partnership). While this information is available to anyone, none of the North Minneapolis organizations and individuals was aware of the guide. Plus, too many minority parents are working two jobs or are simply over-whelmed with their current day-to-day activities. Unless this type of information is easily accessible to low-income parents, they will remain unaware of organizations such as MMEP and the valuable program information they have compiled for minority youth. In March-April of 2008, using the information from this enrichment guide, four different spreadsheets were created and shared with HFTWL, Emerge, and NorthWay, for distribution to the parents and youth they work with (Appendixes D-G).

These spreadsheets provided the "who, what, where and contact" information of the organizations offering a wide variety of summer programs. This was especially important as the mixture of opportunities and experiences are offered by numerous national and local for-profit and non-profit organizations. In addition, the spreadsheets allow the teens and their parents, to easily look through the list together, discuss the various summer learning experiences or employment opportunities available, and make decisions on what to pursue. Many of the organizations have web-sites for the families to obtain additional information about the program, location, and other more specific details. This information also gives teens, with unique and varied interests, the ability to select from a variety of programs and opportunities that could provide them with a positive experience that may potentially last them with a lifetime of new relationships and memories. Giving teens something constructive to do during the summer will reduce the amount of time they spend loitering around the community, keep them off the streets past curfew, and out of trouble. By working with other minorities and/or community businesses, teens will expand their horizons, acquire a sense of community, and hopefully strive to continue to learn.

In September 2007, NorthWay established its first series of *Youth Leadership Training* sessions offered to Minneapolis teens. Parents and teens who graduated from the program were extremely satisfied with the training provided. In March 2008, NorthWay offered another training session. This time, they received more teen applications than one session could accommodate, so they expanded the program offering two sessions. In mid-April, the two groups came together, at which time summer learning and employment spreadsheets were provided to the teens for review, comment, and further discussion. Teens that had not already signed up to participate in a summer activity were strongly encouraged to consider one of the

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many opportunities being offered. Plus, more minority youth participation in these programs is advantageous for the entire community. Once the for-profit and non-profit businesses, social service organizations and young minority individuals begin interacting with each other, they will begin to dispel negative perceptions about one another, while at the same time create learning opportunities for each other. These experiences should also boost participating teen's self-esteem, sense of place, and opinion of the world they live in.

To capture and measure these experiences and opinions, the non-profits will be surveyed to determine which summer programs were utilized by North Minneapolis youth. An evaluation plan matrix was developed, attached as appendix G. Depending upon the number of participants, we anticipated developing a separate survey for distribution to the NorthWay Youth Leadership graduates, the young adults in the STEP-UP program, and the parents of these young people. Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond our control, a survey was deemed unnecessary.

In addition, the organizations agreed to interview parents and young adults, to determine if they were successful in attending or participating in one of these programs. This information was expected to be collected in October/November, 2008. It was anticipated that HFTWL would be most successful in tracking this information as they work with a specific group—their congregation members. Plus, NorthWay as they have a finite group: the graduates of its Youth Leadership Training series. In April 2008, approximately 48 Minneapolis minority youth will be graduating from this training series. Over the summer, NorthWay continued to encourage these young leaders to actively participate with the Youth Coordinating Board (YCB) and other NorthWay sponsored youth activities and community events, such as "Juneteenth" a summer celebration held every June.

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Literature Review

A. School Dropouts

In 1999, Hennepin County commissioned the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Urban Institute to identify family risk factors associated with youth dropping out of high school. This report determined that teens most at risk lived in Minneapolis and further stated:

Researchers are increasingly finding that groups' social and economic behaviors and outcomes are subject to tipping points or thresholds. Below these thresholds, deterioration in group members' undesirable behaviors or poor outcomes is gradual (Hennepin County, Minnesota, 2006).

According to this report, children living in Minneapolis accounted for more than 80 percent of the county total for low school engagement for elementary, middle-school, and high school children (ages 6 to 17). The Minneapolis School District reports 42 percent of the student body are African American and 67 percent of their students qualify for free or reduced priced lunch (Minneapolis Public Schools, 2006).

In 2004, the Minneapolis Foundation engaged the services of the Wilder Foundation to study the impacts of declining education funding for the inner-city public schools: the research discovered a number of negative impacts. Not only did the school districts have to endure significant cuts, many of the support and after-school enrichment programs were also negatively affected (The Minneapolis Foundation, 2002). In addition, the City of Minneapolis documented that an increase in youth violence began after "severe reductions in state funding, including a loss of \$3.27 million in after-school enrichment programs, a loss of \$364,000 in Youth Risk Behavior Grants from the tobacco endowment funds, and a loss of \$700,000 for youth development and parenting support geared towards teen pregnancy prevention." In its first report to the community, *Summer 2004*, on its *Destination 2010* program, the Foundation reported, "studies show that 3 ingredients are essential to help children attain higher education:

- Awareness of post-secondary options
- Academic achievement and readiness
- Financial assistance or scholarships"

The Foundation also discovered that although the "Twin Cities area has a wide-range of youth-serving organizations, [yet] many low-income families and families with language barriers need help and encouragement to take advantage of these great opportunities." To connect these families with the community and encourage active participation, a quarterly family newsletter was developed providing a calendar of events and activities.

In 2006, Minnesota's Hennepin County established a strategic objective: to eliminate intergenerational poverty. To accomplish this, the county knew it would need "to ensure every student graduates from high school and eliminate teen pregnancy." To more fully comprehend the dynamics behind these two behaviors it engaged the services of the Annie E. Casey

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Foundation and the Urban Institute to identify risk factors associated with youth dropping out of high school and teen pregnancy. This research discovered that efforts to educate students about finishing high school and avoiding teen pregnancy needed to “go well beyond the classroom into the environment where the child lives” (Hennepin County, 2006).

The research further identified 6 risk factors associated with dropping out of high school and teen pregnancy that related most “directly to the home environment and the conditions in which a child lives.” “The six risk factors identified are:

- A. Child lives in a single parent household
- B. Parent is a high school dropout
- C. The family income is below poverty level
- D. The parent(s) do not have steady full-time employment
- E. The family receives public assistance
- F. The family has no health insurance.”

This research further determined that teens with the most risk factors lived in Minneapolis:

14 percent of Minneapolis teens have 4 or more risk factors and approximately 25 percent of all Minneapolis teen girls will have 3 or more risk factors” representing about 80 to 71 percent of the county total.

In 1997, the Urban Institute identified 4 risk factors for low school engagement. The first 3 of which are included in the above 6 risk factors. The fourth risk factor was 4 or more children living in the same household (Hennepin County, 2006).

The Recommendation: “The county needs to develop a comprehensive youth development strategy that considers each youth’s individual and family situation and helps them develop and build skills, capacity and support system[s] that will allow them to become self-reliant adults” (Hennepin County, 2006).

“The global information economy demands a highly-educated, highly-skilled workforce,” however, in Minnesota, the number of students graduating from high school and obtaining a bachelor’s degree is dropping. “To maintain its strength in the U. S. and world economy, Minnesota needs more of its high school students to complete some form of higher education. Approximately 15 percent of the populations in Minneapolis and Saint Paul are immigrants.” In addition, “almost 20 percent of some Twin Cities suburban and Greater Minnesota cities” are comprised of immigrant populations (Citizens League, 2007).

Four significant disparities and challenges are encountered by immigrant, minority, low-income and first-generation students:

Information	Culture
Cost	Preparation

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To address these concerns, Hennepin County's *Family Success Program* is reaching out to high school *students* partnering with a number of social service organizations to reduce and eliminate youth truancy, acknowledging the importance of a high school diploma by addressing the social factors that contribute to youth truancy (Hennepin County, 2006).

Recognizing that motivated youth with a high school education have a greater chance of breaking free from intergenerational poverty, the Minneapolis School Board (MPS) working with community leaders and parents established "The North Side Initiative" (Minneapolis Public Schools, 2006). Basically, MPS determined that African American students attending North Side Elementary schools consistently had lower reading and math proficiency levels than the level of all students in the district—except Jordan Park. The North Side Initiative "aims to raise student achievement and ensure an equitable education for all students." The initiative has established four primary goals to eliminate the "achievement gap" between White students and minority students in North Minneapolis schools as it was the "greatest gap of its kind in the state and is growing each year." At the same time, the Initiative surprisingly discovered that an extraordinarily large number of African American males are suspended from school for behavioral reasons (Minneapolis Public Schools, 2007).

This initiative outlines a number of goals to eliminate or significantly reduce the achievement gap by raising African American student performance levels to that of all Minneapolis students. To further examine and address these issues, the MPS Board engaged McKinsey & Company in a strategic planning process to address major systemic issues affecting the MPS system to ensure that every student within the district receives the opportunity of a quality education (Minneapolis Public Schools, 2007). In December 2007, McKinsey & Company presented its final report to the MPS Board, *Transforming the Minneapolis Public Schools: Strategic Plan Recommendation*. The report recommended nine strategic recommendations in three broad categories:

- Increase equity, expectations and achievement
- Focus resources
- Strengthen relationships

The executive summary of the report indicated, 34 percent of Minneapolis students attending MPS do not graduate from high school in four years. In addition, they determined 37 to 70 percent of the students who do graduate are taking remedial college classes, clearly indicating they were not "fully prepared for post-high school life" (McKinsey & Company, Inc, 2007, p. 4). This report also quantifies the lost income cost of students who do not graduate from high school or college to be an average of \$450,000 per student. Plus, there is an additional "\$250,000 per student in costs to taxpayers" for social services (McKinsey & Company, Inc, 2007, p. 6). Obviously, this is only the beginning as much more needs to happen to provide

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these young individuals and their families with real hope for attaining and retaining employment that will sustain them above the poverty level, keep them out of jail, and off the streets.

In the summer of 2008, the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, Inc. (MMEP) launched a new initiative: *Minnesota College Access Network (MCAN)* coupled with the release of a new report. MMEP believes “that educational success is achieved through a process of skill development coupled with the behavioral motivation to pursue competency. Equally important are the messages from teachers/counselor, families, and peers around high expectations and persisting towards success and completion of an educational pathway.” (Minnesota College Access Network, July 2008, p. 3). The report, *College Access Matters: The Opportunity for College Access Programs in Minnesota* is a comprehensive analysis and research of educational opportunities available for Minnesota residents. MCAN hopes to engage municipalities, counties, school boards, and businesses throughout the state to increase educational opportunities for “all students—including students of color, potential first-generation college students, and low-income students” that need to “hear often and from multiple sources of support that they can succeed” (Minnesota College Access Network, July 2008, p. 21). These discussions are just beginning to happen in several rural Minnesota communities.

B. Homelessness

The report, *Minnesota’s Immigrant Students, Phase I: Challenges and Opportunities* focuses primarily on immigrant students and has documented a growing number of minority and low-income homeless children in Minnesota. This report estimates, “. . . that 1.35 million children are likely to experience homelessness each year” and that “each school move results in 3-6 months of lost education for these children. Homeless children are twice as likely to repeat a grade as are other children, four times as likely to have delayed development, and are suspended twice as often as other children” (Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless, 2006). Plus, recent statistics indicate that almost 70 percent “of the homeless and highly mobile students were African American, 10 percent were Asian Americans” followed by White, Native American and Hispanic (Moriarty, 2006).

The report further documents a growing population of homeless youth, referred to as “unaccompanied minors,” who are “generally between the ages of 15 and 18 and are without parental, foster, or institutional care, representing “approximately 3 percent of the urban homeless” (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006). In Minnesota, on any given night, there are approximately 500-600 youth on the streets without permanent shelter, creating tremendous educational challenges for these young people. If they can go to school and maintain employment without disruptive behaviors, they can reside at a homeless youth shelter. This is a demanding challenge for a young person without a consistent adult presence. Plus, for years, many schools refused to enroll homeless youth without a legal guardian, or proper records, or transportation. Only recently through the mandates of the McKinney-Vento legislation, have schools been held accountable to enroll these students (NCH, 2006).

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In 2001, the Minneapolis Diversion Youth Program (MDYP) changed its name to YouthLink, a name that is more appropriate for an organization that connects readily to today's youth.

"Today, YouthLink acts as a community "hub" for youth who are homeless, struggling with their education, or need advocacy to continue life's path" (YouthLink). According to its 2007 annual report, "In the Twin Cities, there are as many as 800 homeless youth under the age of 21 at any given time." They are "forced into homelessness by domestic violence, chemical dependency, or abuse—physical, sexual, emotional" (YouthLink, 2008, p. 2). Without any adult support, financial resources, or direction, homeless youth are often "disconnected and disenfranchised" jumping from couch to couch, until they wear out their welcome.

In June, 2008, the Wilder Research Center released a new report and analysis on "youth and young adult homelessness in Minnesota" based on data obtained from the October 26, 2006 statewide homeless survey (Amherst H. Wilder Foundation , 2008). The data provides startling facts about homeless youth:

. . . on a single night in October 2006—and much less visible to most Minnesotans—were about 1,300 to 2,300 youth ages 8 to 17 and young adults ages 18 to 21 who were homeless and on their own." "Housing alone will not solve their problems. Many need skills in independent living—such as how to keep a checking account, how to do laundry, and how to prepare low-cost meals. Others need the support of a caring adult—having someone they can call in a crisis. (Amherst H. Wilder Foundation , 2008, p. 1).

Typically, "homelessness and truancy—or dropping out [of school] entirely—often go hand-in-hand, many homeless young people don't know that education and graduation are precious commodities" (YouthLink, 2008, p. 6). YouthLink's *Life Transitions* program provides mentors and tutoring services. The educational programs are taught by professional teachers, teaching academic lessons taught at the high schools. YouthLink students are not just given a diploma, *Life Transitions* demands true academic learning, while recognizing and respecting "the pace and abilities of each young person," they expect commitment and performance from each student (YouthLink, 2008).

Through its partnership with Aeon, a Minneapolis housing provider for homeless youth, a recent barrier was discovered. An Internal Revenue Service (IRS) rule that regulates the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program, which provides a significant financial resource for affordable housing projects, prevents full-time students as residents of LIHTC financed housing projects. This rule was established to prevent construction of student-only housing, recognizing that many students are temporarily financially strapped while pursuing their academic studies full-time. Yet today, this regulation is creating a huge disincentive and problem for homeless youth. Formerly homeless youth, living in an affordable housing complex, are prevented from completing high school, getting their GED and/or continuing with their post-secondary education. Property owners, who knowingly allow full-time students to occupy a unit, risk losing

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the LIHTC financing and its investors. Unfortunately, for homeless youth, this regulation is a huge deterrent to their long-term success requiring these youth to choose between having affordable stable housing or getting an education that will provide sustainable lifetime earnings. (Helms, 2008)

C. Employment

In 2000, Minneapolis began losing inner-city jobs as unemployment rose; four years later over 24,000 Minneapolis jobs were lost (City of Minneapolis, 2006, p. 15). The “Close the Gap” initiative was established to address this phenomenon recognizing the inter-connectiveness of the city with the larger metropolitan area—“they either grow together or they decline together” (Sohmer, Jackson, Katz, Liu, & Warren, 2005). A 2004 report by the Minneapolis Citizens League, *Trouble on the Horizon* determined inner-city elementary school enrollment was declining. However, the number of minority and low-income students in the public school systems were increasing. Yet, the achievement levels of these students were uneven and generally inadequate if they were to compete for employment in an increasingly global economy. Its recommendation: greater access to a variety of higher education and training skills would be needed for all Minnesotans, allowing the state’s economy and population to compete in a global economy (Citizens League, 2004).

To turn the tide, Achieve! Minneapolis a local non-profit organization was established specifically to address the growing gaps of educational achievement of inner-city minority youth by recruiting, training and linking them with summer employment opportunities (City of Minneapolis, 2007). This collaborative effort with the Minneapolis Public Schools, City of Minneapolis, numerous local business organizations and foundations is working to prepare public high school students to succeed in school—“to attend, to learn, to grow and to graduate”—to ensure Minnesota and local employers maintain an educated workforce now and into the future. STEP-UP, a youth employment and training program operated by Achieve! Minneapolis is a key program of Minneapolis’ *Close the Gap* campaign to prepare and place Minneapolis youth in summer jobs as an incentive to keep students in school and provide them with meaningful employment opportunities to continue their education. Over 80 percent of the seniors involved in the STEP-UP program graduated from high school, compared to an overall 61 percent graduation rate. In addition 72,000 students visited the high school Career & College Centers. According to Anne Fischer, Minneapolis and Employment Training Program (METP) staff working with the Minneapolis STEP-UP program, received \$1.9 million from the legislature for the program. As a result in 2007, over 2,000 inner-city youth were provided summer employment internships (City of Minneapolis, 2007).

In 2005, Mind the Gap: Reducing Disparities to Improve Regional Competitiveness in the Twin Cities determined “in a region where household income is among the highest in the nation, black household income is among the lowest” (Sohmer, Jackson, Katz, Liu, & Warren, 2005, p. 3). Underneath the economic success of the region are some disturbing social and economic

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disparities, indicating that progress is not widely shared. Three sets of “gaps” or disparities were discovered: Race, Place and Class. The conclusion of this report, states that if nothing is done to correct these disparities the overall economic health of the region will suffer dramatically, especially if the future minority workforce is unprepared to take the jobs vacated by retiring baby boomers (Sohmer, Jackson, Katz, Liu, & Warren, 2005).

In 2006, Minneapolis added 9,000 jobs, with the majority in the Healthcare and Social assistance industries, and achieved the lowest unemployment levels since 2001 (Rybak, 2007). In September 2007, Minneapolis shared with business, education, public, and civic leaders the successes achieved and challenged them to expand these successes to the life science industries (City of Minneapolis, 2007).

The Minneapolis Promise to its residents, youth and employers is to produce a pool of educated workers for this growing and expanding industry. Unfortunately, even with all of these successes the Minneapolis 2006 neighborhood census information for the Jordan, Hawthorne, Willard Hay, and Near North neighborhoods indicates higher unemployment levels than Minneapolis overall. Clearly, indicating that more needs to be done to include these community residents and youth.

In May of 2007, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development prepared a report: *Key Industries, Key Occupations, Key Skills: Targeting Workforce Priorities in the Twin Cities* (attached as appendix H). The report is a component of the Minneapolis Employment and Training Program (METP) Local Plan for Minneapolis for 2007, posted on its web-site and provided for comment by the community in July of 2007 (Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development, 2007). This report indicates, “Every region, county and city is characterized by a set of industries and occupations that set it apart from all others. In the case of the Twin Cities, that industry base is very diverse consisting of numerous manufacturing and service industries that each have their own specific requirements for skilled workers.” Five broad based industries were identified with “a tendency to hire growing tiers of the workforce (e.g. immigrants, retirees, etc.) or their tendency to be capital importers, providing over 90 occupations.” This document provides additional information about these occupations relative to their growing demand and starting salary (Uphoff, 2005). When combined with another document: *Occupations in Demand in all Twin Cities Region and Minneapolis Growing Industries*, Spring 2007, the METP with its partner organizations are able to target training programs to individuals interested in these specific fields, retaining the industry in Minnesota and providing living-wage opportunities for residents.

In December 2008, state economist, Tom Stinson, informed the Minnesota legislature that the national gross domestic product dropped by 1.8%, as the national economy continues to weaken, indications are that the current economic recession could drastically worsen. It’s

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projected that Minnesota could lose 58,000 jobs or more in 2009 as the state is facing a projected \$4.8 billion deficit over the next two years (MARK BRUNSWICK, 2008).

D. Youth Violence

In response to an ever-increasing wave of juvenile crime that could not simply be “arrested away,” the City of Minneapolis established a Youth Violence Prevention Steering Committee. By recognizing “youth violence as a public health problem,” the city charged this committee to create a “comprehensive plan that engages the entire community” to evaluate the systemic causes and recommend long-term solutions (City of Minneapolis, 2008).

In January 2008, the *Blueprint for Action: Preventing Youth Violence in Minneapolis* provided the City with a holistic, multi-faceted response with four primary goals:

- Connect every youth with a trusted adult,
- Intervene at the first sign that youth are at risk for violence,
- Restore youth who have gone down the wrong path, and
- Unlearn the culture of violence in our community.

Instead of ignoring youth, these four goals provided adults in contact with youth permission to reach out. The *Blueprint for Action* added that:

Too often policy makers have viewed youth violence as only a criminal justice issue. More arrests, larger prisons, longer sentences and trying children “as adults” will not solve the problem. Suppression and enforcement alone only serve as band-aids. By seeing youth violence as the public health crisis that it is, we are better able to work across agencies, communities and jurisdictions with youth, parents, teachers, clergy, health providers, and others to protect youth, reduce injuries and deaths, and [most importantly] prevent more acts of violence from ever happening in the first place (City of Minneapolis, 2008).

According to the Children’s Defense Fund, “education costs less than ignorance, preventive health care costs less than emergency room care, preventive family services cost less than out-of-home care, and early childhood education costs less than prisons.” The report makes a number of other pertinent comparisons relative to these costs:

- The average annual per child cost of a mentoring program is \$1,000.
- The cost of providing a year of employment training for unemployed youths is \$2,492.
- The annual per child cost of a quality after-school program is \$2,700.
- The average cost of providing a low-income family with affordable housing is \$6,830.
- The annual per child cost for quality comprehensive full-day, full-year early childhood education is \$13,000.
- The average annual per prisoner cost is \$22,650. States spend on average almost three times as much per prisoner as per public school pupil.

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“Arrest rates increase for youth who are placed in detention centers, county home schools and prison, and the costs of the related arrest, court appearance, and imprisonment cycle are significant.” At Hennepin County Detention Center it cost: “\$9,360 per month, per youth. On average, the Detention Center houses 98 juveniles a day, this adds up to a monthly detention expense of \$917,280 or \$11 million a year” (City of Minneapolis, 2008).

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Project Implementation

Initially, I thought I would be able to interact directly, as a volunteer, with North Minneapolis youth through one of four non-profit organizations working in the community. Over the course of the project, I quickly discovered that this wasn't possible. For a number of legal reasons, individuals working with youth are required to pass extensive back-ground checks to ensure youth are not manipulated or preyed upon. In addition, all parents/guardian must provide their written consent before a child can participate in a specific program. Parents need to know who their child is interacting with, what a program's purpose is, where information is coming from, and so on. As a parent, I fully understood these restrictions. Since, I wasn't employed with a youth-oriented organization and have no academic teaching credentials; my ability to work directly with these youth was limited to interacting with program staff. I identified four non-profit organizations, all located on West Broadway Avenue in Minneapolis, who offered youth programs. However, only two of these organizations—HFTWL and NorthWay—actively welcomed my participation. Therefore, the project evolved into establishing connections with a faith-based non-profit organization, already working in the community, with larger educational youth program initiatives and potential funders. Secondly, over the course of the project, numerous youth-related research reports and youth initiative programs, offered across the country in large municipalities encountering similar difficulties, were shared with these two Minneapolis non-profits.

Through my research efforts, during the spring of 2008, information about two youth-oriented grant resources offered through Wells-Fargo Community Foundation and the Staples Foundation were discovered. In March 2008, Emerge submitted an application to the Staples Foundation requesting \$25,000 to augment its existing youth programs. In April 2008, NorthWay submitted an application to Wells-Fargo requesting \$10,000 for its youth leadership training program. Some of the research provided, gave these organizations a new credible resource that could be referenced when conversing with funders, youth participants, parents and so on about its youth programs and the importance of "leadership training." While some of the research was used to strengthen existing program activities.

In late-March 2008 North Minneapolis parents learned that the Northside YMCA, which typically offers numerous quality summer youth programs, would be closed for renovations over the summer. At the last minute, numerous parents were scrambling, to locate and apply for alternative summer programs for their children. Both HFTWL and NorthWay gave these parents the summer learning and employment spreadsheets to aid them in seeking replacement summer program for their teen-ager(s) (see appendices D-G).

In April, 2008 I sent Council Member Elizabeth Glidden an electronic copy of my Youth Initiatives research paper. Ms. Glidden is the chair of the Youth Coordinating Board (YCB). YCB board members are representatives from the Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis Library, Minneapolis Park and Recreation and other City departments that work directly with youth and

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youth programs. YCB connects directly with the Minneapolis Youth Congress implementing recommendations and ideas that emerge from the Youth Congress to provide additional resources for youth accepted programs. On April 25, 2008 at a morning breakfast meeting with Minneapolis residents, I presented my research findings on “Youth Initiatives” to community advocates working with youth and residents interested in Minneapolis’ *Blueprint for Action* and various efforts to engage Minneapolis youth using a holistic, multi-facet approach to achieve four goals:

- Connect every youth with a trusted adult,
- Intervene at the first sign that youth are at risk for violence,
- Restore youth who have gone down the wrong path, and
- Unlearn the culture of violence in our community. (City of Minneapolis, 2008)

I gave a ten minute presentation to the group about how we can change things for our youth by

- Increasing inner-city youth attendance at the Minneapolis teen job fair;
- Increase awareness and enrollment of the numerous summer academic programs, internships, scholarships, and youth-work opportunities.
- Increase youth participation in the STEP-UP program by North Minneapolis youth;
- Increase mentorship partnerships with North Minneapolis youth;
- Increase participation of Minneapolis youth on the Youth Congress and other youth leadership activities offered in Minneapolis/Saint Paul;

Afterwards, I encouraged everyone to take copies of the summer academic programs and scholarship opportunities specifically geared for minority youth that are being offered this upcoming summer. I encouraged each of them to share this information with all of the young adults they encounter. One gentleman asked me to change the word “all” in the following sentence stating it was too harsh: “So how do we, as citizens in a global economy, actively engage and encourage our inner-city minority youth to lead productive lives, when **all** they see and are exposed to is poverty, violence, drug abuse, racism, and destruction?” He told me that “all” was too broad and that many of the inner-city youth he works with are very artistic and well adjusted—they just happen to be poor. I agreed with his assessment and inquired if the words “majority or a lot” would be more appropriate. He agreed, and I thanked him for his honest feedback, stating I would make this change.

On April 29, 2008 I attended the NorthWay Community Trust Youth Leadership Training Series, Graduation Session. Each teen was asked to write a response to three questions and then share their response with the group.

The first question was: Name one thing you learned during these sessions that you can use in the future? Several of the responses were: taking action instead of just talking; you don’t have to be the leader all of the time; make eye contact and speak loudly and clearly to get your point across; change starts with one person—don’t wait for your friends—take action yourself; do

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your research and get to know the people you're going to work with. Networking with others will take you farther; simple communication—expressing yourself positively versus negatively; prepare in advance for interviews and dress appropriately; don't judge people by appearances until you get to know them.

The second question was: How would you improve this training? The responses were: Ask our opinions and get our feedback after every session; recap at the end of each session the group activities and interaction that occurred amongst each other; more information about youth topics; have the NorthWay staff come in to talk with the youth about its activities and how young people can participate; more information from other organizations working in the area; presentation by the Minneapolis Youth Congress and its work.

The third question was: Share one thing you were surprised to hear about? The teen responses were: the juvenile justice system, how it works and the sentence-to-serve program. Surprised on how serious the system is and the consequences changed their opinion about "fooling around." Meeting new people from other high schools; taking a stand—being creative—coming up with new ideas; reading out loud in front of other people and how hard it really is.

After each participant received their certificates and monetary stipend, a group of girls started talking with me about my interests and why I was there. I spoke about all of the various organizations working to prevent youth violence by providing after school and summer activities for young adults. I spoke about the STEP-UP program and learned that if your family makes more than \$30,000 a year, you can't qualify for a summer internship. I asked if they would be interested in working as a camp counselor for the YMCA Girls club camps. They all expressed an interest. Since they were all under 18 years of age, I asked Lance Knuckles, NorthWay to send the spreadsheets, I created, to all of the graduates and followed up with Lance, the next work day. He reassured me he would follow up and send the summer employment information and scholarships to all of the graduates.

In July, I shared my research paper with E. B. Brown, the program director of the *Kids Ending Relationship Violence* (KERV) program. After reading through the material, she asked if she could cite my research to inform community residents. In addition she asked to use the community profile and census information, I collected in the fall of 2007, for several 2008 grant application submissions requesting financial support for the KERV program. Several months later, E. B. informed me that my paper was extremely useful as she shared many of the recent articles and information about the schools and neighborhood demographics with community residents. This was especially important and enlightening; as she indicated to me that many of these residents were using out-dated information. In late November, 2008 HFTWL was informed they were awarded a Twin Cities Christian Foundation Communities Engaging Youth (CEY) grant for capacity. According to E. B. Brown, HFTWL was one of seven organizations that will receive this funding. She stated the information I provided her on the *Blue Print for Action* goals helped her secure this grant (Brown, Oasis Director, 2008).

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Throughout 2008, I kept in communication with staff at HFTWL, NorthWay, and occasionally with the Jordan Area Community Council (JACC). Unlike past years, NorthWay began soliciting applications for two youth leadership trainings in October, 2008. Plus, the leadership series were a mere three days versus three weeks and the trainings were held during the week of and just before the first Minneapolis Youth Convention held on October 28, 2008. One goal of the NorthWay leadership trainings was to involve more North Minneapolis teens as representatives on the Youth Congress Board. Unfortunately, like many foundations, the Northwest Area Foundation, lost a significant portion of its portfolio in the stock market. This foundation is a major funder of NorthWay, which meant NorthWay had to reduce costs. This was completed by re-prioritizing its programs and reducing staff. In 2008, fifty-seven high school youth graduated from the NorthWay Leadership Training. However, NorthWay did not track the number of youth who took advantage of the summer employment information. Staff indicated receiving several phone calls, and e-mails asking for the information. Last spring, at least 4-5 youth contacted NorthWay requesting the summer youth information. Unfortunately, no longer employed with NorthWay, accessing e-mails or files to confirm this would be impossible. He did send the 2008 spreadsheets to the recent October graduates, stating it definitely sparked their interest (Knuckles, 2009).

The City of Minneapolis is moving forward initiating its *Blue Print for Action* to reduce youth violence. A number of excellent collaborative partnerships with the community, the University of Minnesota, NorthWay Community Trust, the Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board, YouthLink, and others are working together to curb youth violence. Several recent newspaper articles indicated that juvenile crimes decreased over the summer. Yet much, much, more still needs to happen to make sure the growing populations of minority youth have real opportunities for education and economic advancement. It's a slow but steady process. Unfortunately, the economic forecast for the state is rather bleak—everyone is lining up at the MN Legislature advocating for minimal cuts—yet realizing drastic cuts are needed.

The North Minneapolis neighborhoods are working together and have recently established a Northside Achievement Zone, modeled after the Harlem Children's Zone. A steering committee has been established and will begin implementing strategies in January 2009. In addition, NorthWay is currently conducting a feasibility study of the Manchester Bidwell program and has entered into a partnership agreement to initiate the Twin Cities Center for Arts and Technology. In January, Bill Strickland will be the guest speaker at *Changing the Face of Housing* at the College of St. Catherine to talk about his work in Manchester and the possibility of replicating this work in Minneapolis. Although, NorthWay recently reduced its staff to only two, this project is still moving forward.

E. B. Brown, OASIS Director of its Kids Ending Relationship Violence (KERV) program provided me with a lot of information about the KERV program, which they have been offering since 1993. She stated that many inner-city youth have filters and her program tries to break down these filters, giving kids permission to be smart and feel good about their selves. The KERV program is offered at several Minneapolis schools during the school term and two more sessions are

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offered during as a summer camp. The Minneapolis Police department and Fire department send personnel to interact and read with the kids. In addition, they have seniors from the neighborhood tell their life stories, giving the kids a different perspective on life.

Two KERV graduates participated in the NorthWay Youth Leadership Training Series in the spring, 2008. Initially, Lance Knuckles was reluctant, to include these youth in these sessions. Afterwards, he told Ms. Brown, the KERV graduates were some of the best students in the class. They didn't need the same amount of coaching to be a leader. They were actively involved, listened, and encouraged the other teens to participate. He was very pleased and would welcome future KERV graduates to the NorthWay trainings. As for HFTWL keeping track of the kids who may have participated in some of the youth activities provided to the congregation and the daycare parents this past April/May. No formal tracking method was initiated or kept. However, Ms. Brown stated many of the programs required parents to drop the kids off at the program site. Unfortunately, the time when the program accepted kids generally occurred after the parents started work or the program site was too far off the parent's route to work. Several kids participated in the program offered by the College of St. Thomas. The application was easy and the kids could take one bus to the campus and the same bus back home. Some of the other programs offered required the kids to transfer to another bus. Parents were uncomfortable with this arrangement. It's also a big reason why the You'th Are Here bus, provided by the City of Minneapolis, is such a big hit. It's only for youth, who have registered with the City, providing parental or guardian contact information, in case of an emergency or inappropriate behavior. In addition, the youth stops are at the Minneapolis library, Minneapolis Public Schools or Park/Recreation Centers. The city is currently exploring with the Youth Congress to expand these stops to the YMCA, Boys/Girls Club and other such youth-oriented facilities.

At a meeting with Andrea Jenkins, Minneapolis City Council Elizabeth Glidden's aide, we discussed at length the progress of the *Blue Print for Action* and the role of the Youth Coordinating Board and the Youth Congress. In October, 2008 over 200 participants attended the first Youth Convention, held at the Minneapolis Convention Center. Everyone in attendance was encouraged to select and participate in one of six break-out sessions: Transportation, Housing, Employment, Health, Youth Violence and Education. Each break-out session was to create one focus question for the town hall forum. The Education focus questions were: What are ways youth can really own their own education? What are some ideas about how to address racism that youth face each day in school? Five commitments from the convention were established for the policy makers attending the convention.

I also followed-up with Minneapolis Employment Training Program (METP) staff with the STEP-UP program, to obtain additional information the 2009 Teen Job Fair. Staff changed the date of the event from January to April with the youth application deadline the end of January. During this conversation, I discovered METP staff wasn't aware of the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership (MMEP) summer program opportunities. The following day, I sent METP staff the link to MMEP's web site, where they ordered the 2009 book. (Behrend, 2008)

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Progress Report: Monitoring, Evaluation, Continuation

Emerge, HFTWL, and NorthWay were asked to track the number of parents and individuals they gave the 2008 summer program information to, using the flyers that were developed. In April, this information was given to the youth participating in the NorthWay leadership training sessions. It was anticipated that by sharing this information early with North Minneapolis youth and their parents, there would be a subsequent increase in the number of low-to-moderate income minority families taking advantage of these scarce resources. All youth who were not already signed up for specific summer activities were encouraged to look over the list and apply. A group of five young women, at the April graduation event, told me their family's income was too high to qualify for the Minneapolis Promise program. However, when I mentioned that every summer the Girls Scouts of America needs summer counselors at the dozen or so camps they own, each of them were extremely interested in applying for a summer position. At the end of October, 2008, NorthWay reduced staff due to loss of foundation funding and eliminated its Youth Leadership Training.

Unfortunately, many of the summer youth programs started after the adults began their work day, which eliminated any opportunity for parents to drop their child off directly at the facility. Plus, several of the inner-city programs would have required a young individual using the metro bus service to transfer to another bus before arriving at their destination. For parents, the risk of having something go wrong during this transfer was too great—therefore for transportation dependent youth—many of these programs were not used by North Minneapolis families. According to E. B. Brown, three families took advantage of the University of St. Thomas' National Youth Sports program. The application was easy, the deadline was later than a lot of the other programs—June 1, 2008, and North Minneapolis youth could take the metro bus route 5 bus directly downtown. A couple of families called about the Medtronic's Inventors' Club, but it was too late and a few families expressed interest in the Minnesota State Patrol training camp (Brown, Oasis Director, 2008).

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Conclusions and Recommendations

To attract future financial resources for after-school and summer programs and activities, it is critical to increase minority youth attendance and participation in the Minneapolis Teen Job Fair in 2009 and beyond. This is also the case with other key youth programs such as the Minneapolis STEP-UP program, StreetWerks, Teen teamworks, YouthCare, and so on. Otherwise, internships, scholarships and educational opportunities offered by Minnesota colleges/universities, philanthropic foundations, and businesses will decrease and be eliminated, especially without ongoing youth participation.

To address this, NorthWay has encouraged over fifty youth leadership graduates to become more actively involved in their community—as youth ambassadors—exhibiting positive behaviors (NorthWay Community Trust, 2008). Many of these young ambassadors conducted community surveys gathering information about the community and what residents like best. Using this information, several teens worked with adults to create a historical timeline of North Minneapolis that has been coupled with a “positive image” marketing campaign (NorthWay Community Trust, 2008). Plus, youth ambassadors are taking a more active role participating on the Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board (YCB) representing their peers and working with civic leaders to create fun and engaging youth programs that are designed by youth for youth. As ambassadors, these young adults become positive mentors to younger children in the community, changing negative attitudes.

Teens employed over the 2008 summer months in the Emerge-MN StreetWerks stated, “. . . their involvement helped them learn how to work with others and gave them a new sense of concern for the neighborhood. Some said they learned how to look at the long-term importance and consequences of the choices they make” (NorthWay Community Trust, 2008). In addition to the earnings, it kept them busy and out of trouble. As these teens begin engaging in constructive summer experiences, they will start influencing their peers and more teens will want to participate. I recommend that Youth Leadership training opportunities and community summer employment opportunities like these be expanded throughout Minneapolis, providing urban youth with participation and community connections that are so desperately needed.

However, a critical first step is connecting these future leaders with information on meaningful opportunities available to anyone, willing to apply. These opportunities are just the beginning of launching young adults into a new network of friends and relationships, expanding their current view of the world around them, beyond their current neighborhoods and hopefully encouraging them to graduate from high school and continue on to college. As leaders they will begin to acknowledge and learn about programs and additional resources available within their community. These include, the free two-year scholarship program offered to all Minneapolis high school graduates by Minneapolis Community Technical College or the four-year scholarship program offered by the University of Minnesota.

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My project was designed to provide research and specific youth-oriented programmatic information to inner-city minority parents, teens and North Minneapolis youth-oriented organizations. Too often, these are the youth who are excluded from the programs that will assist them the most. The idea was that by opening doors previously closed and offering positive employment opportunities and activities, participating young adults would begin to change their negative behaviors, and thereby change their futures. Alternative educational, employment, and enrichment program activity offerings can bring about positive behavioral changes. This is the first step needed to establish a sustainable economic path out of poverty and halt participation in gangs and criminal activity, as youth begin to **learn to earn**.

Minneapolis is poised at a turning point. Over the past several years, connections with the community and its youth have begun. Several new initiatives and collaboration are emerging working with youth by redirecting negative behavior into positive actions. The Minneapolis Youth Congress motto is: "No decision about us, without us!" (City of Minneapolis, 2008). Changing the attitudes of young individuals by giving them direct access to youth program decision makers and encouraging this dialogue, provides these youth with a real ability to make changes. Participating in rewarding and positive youth solutions establishes respect amongst participants and directs youth energies to resolutions combating urban youth issues. Working with organizations on challenges urban youth encounter creates long-lasting and meaningful relationships for these young adults.

Over the past five years the General Mills Foundation has been working with the Hawthorne Area Community Council in North Minneapolis. At the January 8, 2009, Hawthorne Huddle Community Meeting, the agenda was: *Programs to Positively Engage Our Youth*. Community residents, police representatives, and staff from community service organizations were introduced to three youth initiatives that are creating positive results. Oral presentations and testimonials were presented by representatives from the Youth Congress discussing the Youth are Here Bus project; Yo! The Movement, and Girls in Action. All of these programs promote community service projects, safe youth activities and events for young adults encouraging positive proactive attitudes and behaviors. Yo! The Movement works with the juvenile justice system to reduce the rate of recidivism of young offenders. The Girls in Action program matches each participant with a volunteer professional coach who connects regularly with the girl to ensure they are keeping on track to graduate from high school and continue to college.