

# Saint Paul Children's Collaborative Tri-Project Initiative

*Early lessons learned*

MARCH 2010

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# Contents

Summary .....	1
Project background .....	9
Evaluation activities .....	10
Project summaries .....	11
A collaboration framework .....	16
A definition of collaboration .....	16
Characteristics of successful collaboration .....	17
Stakeholder perspectives .....	21
Alignment between project goals and activities .....	21
Partnerships between families, programs and systems .....	22
Use of culturally-specific approaches in service delivery .....	27
Parent/youth outcomes .....	29
Implementation accomplishments and barriers .....	30
Conclusions and recommendations .....	36
References .....	39
Appendix .....	41
Stakeholders interviewed .....	43
Characteristics of projects funded by the Saint Paul Children’s Collaborative .....	44

# Figures

1. Levels of inter-agency interactions .....	16
2. Advantages and disadvantages of collaborative decision-making styles .....	19

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# Summary

The mission of the St. Paul Children’s Collaborative (SPCC) is to engage policy-makers, communities, business leaders, and other stakeholders to strengthen the social and economic fabric of St. Paul to support the healthy development of children. In 2008, the SPCC reviewed local data to determine where their resources may be best spent. This review pointed out disparities among African American youth in academic achievement, involvement in the child-serving systems (i.e., child protection, juvenile justice), and rates of out of home and foster care placements, especially in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty. As a result of this work, the SPCC moved forward a 3-year initiative (the Tri-Project Initiative) to fund three projects serving African American boys in three targeted St. Paul neighborhoods: North End, Summit-University, and Payne-Phalen.

The SPCC Board specified that each project should develop a partnership between community-based organizations and child-serving systems to address two key goals:

1. Improving child safety by decreasing the number of African American males who enter the child protection and/or out of home placement (foster care) system
2. Improving school success by increasing school attendance, decreasing the number of reported problem behaviors and improving academic proficiency of African American males

The SPCC Board holds responsibility for a third outcome:

3. Breaking down policy barriers within the SPCC systems (city, county, and school) that contribute to disparities in outcomes and/or limit the abilities of families to access the resources necessary for success

The purpose of this report is to capture information about early lessons learned by each project since funding began in 2008, identify challenges to program implementation, describe early indicators of project success, and consider opportunities to improve and enhance collaboration within projects and across systems. A focused literature review on effective collaboration and key informant interviews with 28 stakeholders were conducted for this project.

## ***Project descriptions***

Each of the three projects was designed to use strategies to address the three goal areas of increased academic success, improved family stability, and enhanced partnerships between communities and child-serving systems. Some of the common elements across all projects include: a focus on African American boys; an emphasis on helping youth and families build connections to their community and existing resources; the use of cultural approaches to engage youth and families and build a stronger sense of cultural self-identity; common program elements (i.e., tutoring, parent training, culturally-focused events/workshops); and partnerships with community-based organizations and child-serving systems (i.e., schools, county human services).

The key agencies and organizations affiliated with each project are listed below:

Building Future Leaders	Chosen to Achieve, Cultural Wellness Center, Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD), Ramsey County Human Services, St. Paul Public Schools
East Side Heritage Project	African American Academy for Accelerated Learning (AAAL), Merrick Community Center, Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD), Past Athletes Concerned about Education (PACE)
Project VOICE	Cultural Wellness Center, Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD), Project Kofi, Ramsey County Social Services (multiple departments), St. Paul Public Schools, Ramsey County Sheriff's Department, Walker West Music Academy, YWCA

## ***A collaboration framework***

A significant body of literature identifies the key characteristics of successful collaboration, common barriers to collaborative efforts, and strategies to prevent or minimize the impact of these challenges. Key strategies to achieve collaboration, including examples of practices and policies that have been successful approaches for existing collaborations and strategies that increase a collaborative's resiliency are identified in the report and provides the reader with a framework to better contextualize the areas of accomplishment and challenges identified by stakeholders.

Although collaboration and cooperation are terms often used interchangeably, they reflect different levels along a continuum of agency interaction and coordination. Each level of interaction contains strategies to increase communication, shared decision-making, and trust, with the intensity of these efforts increasing as partners move towards full collaboration. There are a number of factors shown to influence the success of a collaborative initiative.

Four factors that seem most relevant to the work of projects funded by the SPCC include purpose, communication, decision-making, and resiliency. Key elements related to each of these four factors that contribute to the collaborative success are described below:

### **Purpose**

- Collaborative partners have a share vision that is understood by all partners and extends beyond the mission or purpose of any single agency.
- When agencies partner, they choose strategies that are beneficial to their own agency, but consistent with the larger shared vision and purpose of the collaborative.
- One of the most important factors that help collaboratives stay together is the commitment all partners have in serving a specific target population.

### **Communication**

- Successful collaboratives utilize frequent and open communication to keep all partners informed and ensure partners have opportunities and share the responsibility of providing feedback to discussions and decisions.
- Many collaboratives rely on a blend of formal and informal communication strategies to enhance existing partnerships and strengthen coordination across agencies.
- In order for open, honest dialogue to occur, there must be trust among all collaborative partners.

### **Decision-making**

- There are multiple decision-making structures that can be appropriate for collaborative to use.
- A successful governance structure is one that shares both decision-making authority and responsibility for adhering to decisions across the entire group.
- Although it is essential that agreement is reached when decisions are made, this does not mean that each decision will be identified as the best possible solution for each individual agency.

## **Resiliency**

- It is important for the partnership to consider how adaptive they are to changes in political climate, community needs, funding, and leadership.
- Over time, the level of involvement across partners and degree to which the work of each agency intersects with the mission of the collaborative may also evolve. This means that the influence and involvement of each partner may not be equal, but is equitable.
- Partner agencies should expect that their internal policies, procedures, and protocols will also change over time to reflect the work of the collaborative.

## ***Stakeholder perspectives***

A number of consistent themes emerged during the key informant interviews conducted with project representatives and the SPCC Board. While stakeholder perspectives varied based on the project they were affiliated with and their level of involvement as a project partner, a number of common themes emerged during the key informant interviews. Although the barriers and concerns identified by program stakeholders were fairly consistent across projects, the degree to which these barriers impacted the delivery of services varied considerably. Similarly, while the projects identified similar early accomplishments and observed changes among youth and families, some projects had experienced greater success in meeting their goals than others.

## **Alignment between project goals and activities**

Across all projects and stakeholder groups, there was a common understanding of the intended goals of the three projects identified by the SPCC Board. Those interviewed felt the focus on improved academic achievement and increased family stability is important and addressed both directly and indirectly through program activities.

- Stakeholders felt their project contributes to success in the youth-focused goal areas through specific program components and indirect activities that help youth and families develop a stronger sense of cultural self-identity. These approaches and activities offer new opportunities to youth and families, empower families to seek resources and support, help parents develop effective advocacy skills, provide role models to youth, and facilitate connections between the family and community.
- Many stakeholders identified building relationships, providing outreach, role modeling, and facilitating connections to community resources as important ways they provide services and supports to families.



- A number of stakeholders felt it was important to specify their service-delivery approach emphasizes empowering families to access the resources available in the community, not simply to provide services to the family.
- All projects have worked to enhance their ability to partner with a variety of child-serving systems, but full collaboration between community organizations and established systems has proven difficult.

### **Partnership between families, programs, and systems**

The stakeholders interviewed described their accomplishments and challenges to effective partnership and collaboration at three levels, the: 1) individual level (the relationships between project staff and families); 2) project level (the relationships among project partners); and 3) system level (the relationships between projects and key child-serving systems). At each level, the goals of partnership and strategies used to develop relationships are somewhat different, as are the amount of success each project has experienced in these areas.

- All staff identified parent engagement and recruitment as critical to project success, but the three projects have taken different approaches to provide outreach and build relationships with families.
- Most stakeholders felt it was incredibly helpful, but not essential, for outreach staff to be African American. Stakeholders felt the approach taken by staff was critically important to successfully engaging families.
- Stakeholders felt the long-term relationships they built with parents and youth and connections they facilitated between families and community resources empowered families to seek these resources independently, and ultimately helped families avoid crises.
- While many of the partners knew of one another before the projects began, many did not have a history of working together collaboratively. While the level of collaboration between partner organizations varies by project, all felt there were opportunities to work more effectively across agencies and enhance the partnerships already in place.
- While there are efforts made by all projects to ensure youth are referred to the types of services and programs they need, overall the level of service coordination across partners of all projects was relatively low. There is also a need to more clearly define what it means to be a participant in each project.

- To varying degrees, stakeholders from all projects identified a need to improve communication between partners.
- Across all projects, stakeholders discussed the importance of building relationships with school staff at all levels (administration, teachers, and social workers) to ensure buy-in. Overall, project stakeholders agreed that it takes considerable time and effort to build relationships with schools and county agencies.
- Data sharing concerns, decision-making procedures, flexibility in service delivery procedures, and hiring/staffing practices are challenges for collaboration between projects and larger child-serving systems.

### **Use of culturally-specific approaches in service delivery**

One of the most important and unique characteristics of these projects is their focus on culturally-specific programming. The culturally-specific strategies used by each project fell into three main categories: the integration of cultural concepts into specific services, use of mentors and informal role models, and emphasis on building a stronger community network. When culturally-specific approaches are used, stakeholders felt they helped youth and parents develop a greater sense of cultural self-identity and optimism in their future, as well as deeper connections to the community. While stakeholders from all projects felt these outcomes were a cornerstone of their work, it was not as clear whether stakeholders had a shared theory of how these outcomes ultimately led to greater success in the two goal areas of academic achievement and student safety.

### **Parent/youth outcomes**

A number of stakeholders felt it was too early to know how well the projects were working. While they felt they were doing the right types of activities to support youth and families, they did not know whether their work would ultimately result in academic gains for children and an improved home environment for the child and family. While the stakeholders agreed these were important goals, there was some concern that these outcomes are difficult to change and the less tangible factors that also influence school achievement and family stability are challenging to measure.

Although it is too early to report evaluation outcomes for youth and parents enrolled in each project, a number of program stakeholders described changes they were seeing in the individual youth and parents they work with. Some of the common outcomes observed by staff across all three projects included a greater sense of hope and optimism among youth and parents, improvements in students' academic achievement, and greater parent involvement and engagement in the community.

## **Implementation accomplishments and barriers**

Across all projects, common accomplishments and barriers were identified. However, the degree to which each outcome had been achieved and each barrier had impeded service delivery varied significantly across project. Some of the key accomplishments identified by stakeholders include:

- New relationships are being formed across organizations and systems that help the projects offer a comprehensive array of services and resources to families.
- Working with other agencies helped each program reach families who would not have otherwise sought out their services, and these services are helping families who have felt isolated in their community.
- The improved coordination between schools and community-based organizations was also considered an early accomplishment by some stakeholders, but all agreed this work could be improved.
- The work of the projects are leading to observable changes among youth and families, such as improved reading and classroom behavior among youth, indications of greater parent participation in school. Stakeholders also noted parents and youth displaying greater self-confidence, better ties to the community, and more hope and optimism for their future.

A number of common environmental, system, and program barriers were also identified by the stakeholders interviewed:

- Changes in the state and national economy have had a major impact on the stability of families who live in the three neighborhoods targeted through these interventions.
- Transportation to services continues to be a significant barrier for some youth and families.
- Representatives from all projects, as well as the SPCC Board, are concerned about the sustainability of the Tri-Project effort.
- Despite representation of the SPPS district and Ramsey County Community Human Services on committees and partnerships between these systems and individual projects, data sharing practices continue to be cumbersome and a barrier to the projects.
- To varying degrees, communication across all projects was hampered by a lack of administrative staff time and different expectations and project vision among partners.
- Although stakeholders from all project agreed direct outreach to youth and parents was the best way to engage families in services, relationship-building through face-to-face contact takes significant staff time.

- Due to delays in funding for the evaluation, project staff have been going back to parents to gather consent from participants. While project staff will continue to work on this task, it is time-consuming and there is some concern about the number of families who will ultimately participate.

## ***Conclusions and recommendations***

The information gathered through the key informant interviews highlighted a number of key lessons learned during the first 18 months of the projects. Some of the most important accomplishments and areas of concern include:

- Culturally-appropriate approaches show promise in engaging and supporting youth and families.
- Significant time and effort is needed to develop relationships with families and build connections within the African American community.
- Additional support to projects around infrastructure expectations and data sharing practices may help program implementation.
- While interagency partnerships have been established, full collaboration has not occurred.
- Sustainability strategies are needed, especially in order to support project leadership and infrastructure.

Building on the projects' accomplishments and developing strategies to address ongoing challenges may be helpful to each project in moving forward, as well as to the Board as it considers ways to support both current projects now and those they fund in the future. Based on the information gathered during this qualitative evaluation, Wilder Research has developed the following recommendations for the SPCC Board and funded projects:

- Develop clear strategies to improve communication across project partners.
- Clarify data sharing procedures across programs, as well as between programs and systems.
- Consider using a self-assessment to determine ways to increase collaboration within each project and across the Tri-Project Initiative.
- Continue conversations to define and describe how culturally-specific approaches are being used throughout the Tri-Project Initiative and contribute to improved outcomes.

# Project background

The mission of the St. Paul Children's Collaborative (SPCC) is to engage policy-makers, communities, business leaders, and other stakeholders to strengthen the social and economic fabric of St. Paul to support the healthy development of children. The St. Paul Children's Collaborative is a partnership forged by Ramsey County, the City of St. Paul, St. Paul Public Schools, Head Start, and the community, charged with avoiding duplication of services and creating an integrated system of service delivery to children and families. The Collaborative distributes federal Local Collaborative Time Study (LCTS) funds to community based organizations serving children to further its mission.

Historically, the SPCC has distributed 1-year funding to 10-12 community-based organizations that provide key services to youth and families in St. Paul. However, in 2008, the SPCC reviewed local data to determine where their resources may be best spent. This review pointed out disparities in academic achievement and involvement in the child protection, out of home placement or foster care and juvenile justice systems, especially in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty. As a result of this work, the SPCC moved forward a 3-year initiative (the Tri-Project Initiative) to fund three projects serving African American boys in three targeted St. Paul neighborhoods: North End, Summit-University, and Payne-Phalen.

The SPCC Board specified that each project should develop a partnership between community-based organizations and child-serving systems to address two key goals:

1. Improving child safety by decreasing the number of African American males who enter the child protection and/or out of home placement (foster care) system
2. Improving school success by increasing school attendance, decreasing the number of reported problem behaviors and improving academic proficiency of African American males

The SPCC Board holds responsibility for a third outcome:

3. Breaking down policy barriers within the SPCC systems (city, county, and school) that contribute to disparities in outcomes and/or limit the abilities of families to access the resources necessary for success

Each project was given considerable autonomy to determine the types of partnerships that would need to be in place to address the needs of youth and families in their communities and address these goals. However, meetings of the three projects have been held regularly

to share lessons learned, address common barriers, and consider the best ways to sustain their efforts.

## ***Evaluation activities***

An evaluation committee, consisting of representatives from each project, Ramsey County Human Services, and St. Paul Public Schools, was convened early in the project to develop a framework to assess the effectiveness of the projects. However, because Local Collaborative Time Study (LCTS) dollars cannot be used for some infrastructure elements, such as administrative duties, communication/coordination between partners, and evaluation, the committee could plan for, but not implement, an evaluation of the projects. Some funding became available to develop Access databases that allowed each program to document demographic information and service utilization data for the youth and families served by their program. However, funding for other evaluation activities was not available until financial support from the Traveler's Foundation, US Bancorp Foundation, the Greater Twin Cities United Way, and the Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties was obtained in Fall 2009.

The purpose of this report is to capture information about early lessons learned by each project since funding began in 2008, identify challenges to program implementation, describe early indicators of project success, and consider opportunities to improve and enhance collaboration within projects and across systems. (A comprehensive report, summarizing this information, results from a series of focus groups with youth and parents, and youth outcome data will be prepared in Summer 2010.) A focused literature review was conducted to identify key factors that lead to effective collaboration. Key informant interviews were also conducted with 28 stakeholders, representing the Board, consultants, project coordinators, and staff from each project. A list of stakeholders interviewed can be found in the appendix. The interviews focused on five key areas:

- **Alignment between goals and project components.** What are the main goals of your program? Which program components contribute to improved youth outcomes in areas of: 1) academic achievement and 2) reductions in out-of-home placements and/or child protection involvement?
- **Partnerships across agencies and systems.** How has your program worked differently with community stakeholders, partner agencies, and families to serve youth and families?
- **Use of cultural approaches in service delivery.** These programs emphasize building on the strengths of African American youth and families to positively change outcomes. How does your program integrate cultural self-awareness into services?

How is this approach different than the approach taken by other organizations/systems to address the needs of African American youth and families?

- **Implementation barriers and accomplishments.** What have been the most significant barriers to program implementation? What do you see as areas of success in your program?
- **Parent/youth outcomes.** What changes are you seeing in the youth and families served through your program?

The information gathered through the key informant interviews was analyzed to identify key themes, as well as unique challenges and approaches identified by individual programs. Using the data gathered from these interviews and information describing factors that lead to successful collaboration, the report includes recommendations to further enhance the projects.

### ***Project summaries***

Each of the three projects was designed to use strategies to address the three goal areas of increased academic success, improved family stability, and enhanced partnerships between communities and child-serving systems. Some of the common elements across all projects include: a focus on African American boys; an emphasis on helping youth and families build connections to their community and existing resources; the use of cultural approaches to engage youth and families and build a stronger sense of cultural self-identity; common program elements (i.e., tutoring, parent training, culturally-focused events/workshops); and partnerships with community-based organizations and child-serving systems (i.e., schools, county human services).

Although the three projects share the same overarching goals and contain some common program elements, there are important differences between each project in terms of the partners involved, the approach to service delivery, and overall structure of each partnership. The following summaries describe some of the key service delivery components of each project. A brief summary of the key components of each project can also be found in the appendix.

#### **Building Future Leaders**

Of the three projects, Building Future Leaders (BFL) has been most closely tied to the St. Paul Public Schools system. Initially, the parent liaison for the project was an employee of the district and the project was focused primarily on providing services to students from two-schools, an elementary and a middle school. In September 2009, the project decided to expand the reach of their project by hiring an outreach worker (the

Education Systems Navigator) from a community-based organization and focusing their efforts on a total of seven elementary and junior high schools to reach more African American youth and families who live in the North End community.

The following programs/organizations are BFL partners:

- **Chosen to Achieve.** This St. Paul Public School program provides mentoring services to African American middle school students.
- **Cultural Wellness Center.** The Cultural Wellness Center is a nonprofit community-based organization focused on engaging people in using cultural approaches as a resource for taking responsibility for their own health and well-being. As a BFL partner, the organization offers culturally-focused group activities and events to youth and parents. The education systems navigator for BFL is an employee of this partner organization.
- **Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD).** NdCAD provides a variety of academic and cultural enrichment programs. As a BFL partner, they are contracted to provide two specific services, a youth tutoring program in reading (Sankofa) and a parent training program that helps parents help their children improve in reading (Parent Power).
- **Ramsey County Human Services.** A social worker from the Ramsey County Family and Community Partnership Program works with partner schools and the Education Systems Navigator to identify youth and families who may need additional support to address a variety of issues, including child safety issues.
- **St. Paul Public Schools.** BFL has strong connections with SPPS, both in their support to provide key staffing and leadership for the project and as a primary referral source.

Leadership for the project has come primarily through the school district through in-kind contributions of staff time. However, there have been changes in key leadership over time. Communication between partners occurs through project meetings and other informal communication across partners. The project partners met quarterly during the first two years of the projects, but have recently begun to meet monthly. BFL reports they have provided services to a total of 148 students through December 2009. However, this does not include the total number of students who have received services from the Ramsey County Social Worker who is involved in this partnership.



## **East Side Heritage Project**

The project with the strongest connection to the community is likely the East Side Heritage Project, located in the Payne-Phalen neighborhood of St. Paul. Many of the project staff, including the program coordinator, youth worker, and family support worker, have offices in the Merrick Community Center. While the program works with schools and makes referrals to county agencies, these partners are not as closely tied to the project.

The following programs/organizations are East Side Heritage Project partners:

- **African American Academy for Accelerated Learning (AAAL).** AAAL provides a cultural enrichment program for youth and parents that helps youth learn about African heritage and cultural traditions that have been adopted and are part of their culture today.
- **Merrick Community Center.** The center is the physical location for much of East Side Heritage's programming and the site housing a number of key staff, including the Family Worker, Youth Worker, and project coordinator. These staff provide support to parents and youth through one-on-one interactions and group activities. Because the center has a van, the program has been able to address some of the transportation barriers faced by families.
- **Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD).** NdCAD provides a variety of academic and cultural enrichment programs. As an East Side Heritage partner, they are contracted to provide two specific services, a youth tutoring program (Sankofa) and parent training program that helps parents help their children improve in reading (Parent Power).
- **Past Athletes Concerned about Education (PACE).** This organization provides group and individual mentoring to youth, focusing on youth with academic and behavioral problems. Weekly groups are currently held in two schools, and a basketball academy, that includes gym time and group activities, is held Saturdays at Merrick. A Boys Assembly is also held several times a year at a local middle school.

The project coordinator is a staff person at the community center, and meetings are held monthly to discuss project concerns. A unique aspect of the program is their emphasis on direct community outreach. Instead of relying on referrals to come through partner organizations, the family support worker spends time meeting families in the community through door-to-door outreach and follow-up calls with parents. The East Side Heritage Project reports they have provided services to 615 youth through December 2009.

## **Project VOICE**

Project VOICE has the largest number of partners involved in the project. The program is housed at the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center in a center called the Hub. A variety of services are available to youth and families through the Hub, including assistance from Ramsey County case managers, public health workers, and financial workers. The project uses a more formal, centralized intake process to identify the needs of youth and families referred to the project from schools and partner organizations. Referrals across agencies are facilitated by the project coordinator.

The following programs/organizations are Project VOICE partners:

- **Cultural Wellness Center.** The Cultural Wellness Center is a nonprofit community-based organization focused on engaging people in using cultural approaches as a resource for taking responsibility for their own health and well-being. As a Project VOICE partner, the organization offers culturally-focused group activities and events to youth and parents.
- **Hallie Q. Brown Community Center.** The community center is home to the Hub, a centralized location for youth and families to access some Ramsey County services and other resources, and the project coordinator. Family Nights, events for Project VOICE participants and the broader community, are also held at the center.
- **Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD).** NdCAD provides a variety of academic and cultural enrichment programs. As a Project VOICE partner, they are contracted to provide two specific services, a youth tutoring program (Sankofa) and parent training program that helps parents help their children improve in reading (Parent Power).
- **Project Kofi.** A program of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, Project Kofi provides culturally-specific, school-based mental health services to youth with behavioral concerns.
- **Ramsey County Departments.** A variety of Ramsey County departments provide services to youth and families through Project VOICE. A child protection case manager works with schools to identify youth with truancy issues, while financial workers and public health workers have provided services at the Hub.
- **St. Paul Public Schools.** Project VOICE works to build relationships with school administrators, social workers, and teachers to increase awareness of the project and the services it provides and to help families build stronger connections with the schools.

- **Ramsey County Sheriff’s Department.** The Ramsey County Sheriff ‘s Department provides an in-kind staff person (a Community Service officer) to serve as Project Coordinator and Information and Referral Specialist. Responsibilities of this staff person includes working with families to determine and connect families the most appropriate Project VOICE or external services and/or programs to address their needs.
- **Walker West Music Academy.** Walker West Music Academy is a nonprofit music school. The academy provides musical and artistic enrichment activities, including lessons, to support Project VOICE youth participants.
- **YWCA.** The YWCA St. Paul provides youth ages 7-14 with opportunities to participate in the Youth Achievers Program (YAP). The YAP program provides youth with afterschool academic, technology, leadership, and lifestyle enrichment activities, while also focusing on healthy choices.

Project VOICE also holds monthly meetings for representatives of all programs to attend. A unique aspect of the program is their care coordination meetings for youth. These meetings are held for approximately one-third of Project VOICE participants, focused primarily on youth who seem to have the greatest needs and would benefit the most from a coordinated array of services. These meetings allow program staff to speak to one another about the needs of the child and family and services that may be most helpful to support the family. Project VOICE reports they have provided services to 305 youth through December 2009.

# A collaboration framework

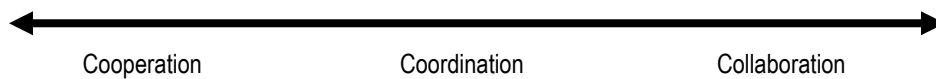
A significant body of literature identifies the key characteristics of successful collaboration, common barriers to collaborative efforts, and strategies to prevent or minimize the impact of these challenges. This summary highlights key strategies to achieve collaboration, including examples of practices and policies that have been successful approaches for existing collaborations and strategies that increase a collaborative's resiliency. This background information on effective collaboration is intended to provide the reader with a framework to better contextualize the areas of accomplishment and challenges identified by stakeholders.

## *A definition of collaboration*

Although collaboration and cooperation are terms often used interchangeably, they reflect different levels along a continuum of agency interaction and coordination (Thomson & Perry, 2006). As seen in Figure 1, this spectrum of interactions can range from informal partnerships between agencies (cooperation) to a system where all partners share existing resources, authority, and rewards (collaboration) (Selden, Sowa & Sandfort, 2006).

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### 1. Levels of inter-agency interactions



Each level of interaction contains strategies to increase communication, shared decision-making, and trust, with the intensity of these efforts increasing as partners move towards full collaboration. This framework provides a common language that can be used by agencies to assess their current level of partnership, establish a shared understanding of what interagency work means within the project, and identify goals and strategies to move along this continuum towards more effective collaboration.

Collaboration is difficult to achieve. Often, collaborative efforts are initiated in response to a complex problem that a single agency cannot address alone, a need to provide integrated services to address a target population's broad range of needs, or a perceived opportunity to make significant changes and improvements to existing systems. Regardless of whether the collaborative is formed to respond to a crisis or opportunity, the work of the group to address these broad issues is often complicated and time-consuming. Although a number of stakeholders may be interested in working together to address a shared concern, many groups find it difficult to enter true collaborative

partnerships where there are common goals, mutually-understood relationships, and sharing of decision-making authority, accountability, and resources. Sharing of power and resources can easily lead to tension across agencies. However, it is important to remember that conflict and stress can also be an indicator of commitment by agencies, and can be a healthy part of a collaborative's growth and development (La Piana, 2001).

## ***Characteristics of successful collaboration***

In 2001, an extensive review of cross-disciplinary literature describing effective collaboration was conducted, leading to the identification of 20 factors that influence the success of collaboration (Mattessich & Monsey, 2001). Although each of these factors are important, the unique characteristics of each collaborative require a different blend of strategies to strengthen current partnerships and address barriers that are impeding the work of the collaborative. Some of the most important factors that seem most relevant to the work of projects funded by the SPCC can be grouped into four main categories: 1) purpose; 2) communication; 3) decision-making; and 4) resiliency.

### **Purpose**

A key distinction made between true collaborative efforts and other, less integrated partnerships, is the relationship between mutual benefits and individual gains. When agencies choose to partner, they negotiate strategies that are beneficial to themselves and the mission of their agency. However, collaborative partners have a shared vision that is understood by all partners and extends beyond the mission or purpose of any single agency. The mission and goals of the collaborative are identified as one source as the group's "sphere of activity" (Mattessich & Monsey, 2001). Although this sphere may overlap with the goals and mission of a partner organization, it should also contain components that are shared by other organizations or unique to the collaborative itself.

One of the most important factors that help collaboratives stay together is the commitment all partners have in serving a specific target population (Thomson & Perry, 2006). By focusing on the larger issues being addressed by the collaborative, individual members may be less likely to focus on the individual benefits they hope their organization will gain through the collaborative and instead, consider ways in which their participation in the collaboration will result in changes that positively impact the target population.

### **Communication**

Successful collaboratives utilize frequent and open communication to keep all partners informed and discuss possible approaches to addressing problems. Although it is important to use a variety of communication strategies to reflect the preferences of the

group, it is important that these different approaches are offered as communication strategies to all members. If different communication occurs with various types of collaborative partners, such as oral communication only being used for meetings with a small group of stakeholders, splintering of the group may occur (Mattessich & Monsey, 2001). Effective communication strategies should be encouraged throughout the collaborative, with all partners having the opportunity and responsibility of providing feedback to discussions and decisions.

Many collaboratives rely on a blend of formal and informal communication strategies to enhance existing partnerships and strengthen coordination across agencies (Darlington & Feeney, 2008). Although relationships between individual partners are essential, communication strategies that rely on the characteristics and effort of individuals can be difficult to maintain through transitions in staffing or other barriers. Therefore, it is also important to establish common expectations among all collaborative partners and develop consistent communication processes.

In order for open, honest dialogue to occur, there must be trust among all collaborative partners. Successful collaboratives often hold individual meetings with potential and existing partners to build personal relationships outside of regular group meetings (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). This not only creates an opportunity to build trust between partners, but also allows individuals to discuss and resolve issues they may not feel comfortable discussing in large group settings.

### **Decision-making**

There are three major types of decision-making structures: autocratic systems where one person makes the decision; democratic systems where all partners have a vote on each issue; and a diffused system where small groups have autonomy to make decisions assigned to them (Ray, 2002). These different types of structures are appropriate to collaborations at varying levels of maturity, however different situations may require a unique type of decision-making approach. Figure 2 describes each type of decision-making structure and when it may be most useful to a collaborative.

## 2. Advantages and disadvantages of collaborative decision-making styles

Type of decision-making system	System characteristics	Advantages/disadvantages
Autocratic	Decisions are made by a small group of individuals	<p>Early decisions can be made quickly</p> <p>Although useful for getting started, the approach does not align with a truly collaborative approach</p>
Democratic	<p>The votes of all partners carry equal weight, with the decision representing the perspectives of the group majority</p> <p>All partners make decisions on all issues</p>	<p>Provides opportunities to increase trust, communication, and positive relationships among partners</p> <p>Can be used to increase buy-in when important topics are being discussed by the collaborative</p> <p>May be a useful approach when critical decisions affecting the direction of the collaborative are being made</p> <p>The decision-making process can be delayed to allow all partners to share their perspectives</p> <p>Large face-to-face meetings are often required to allow opportunities for discussion and debate</p>
Diffused	<p>Many small groups operate simultaneously to make decisions on specific issues</p> <p>Core members have responsibility for communicating decisions back to all key stakeholders</p> <p>People and agencies who are not part of the collaborative can provide input to small group decisions, when appropriate</p>	<p>Decisions are made by stakeholders most informed and invested in key topics</p> <p>Perspectives from stakeholders outside the collaborative can add to the small group discussions</p> <p>Meetings are often smaller in size and more manageable</p> <p>All small groups need a shared understanding of the decisions that can be made independently or require additional input from the full collaborative</p>

Successful collaboration relies on partners having joint decision-making authority about the rules and standards that govern the behavior of the group and relationships between agencies (Thomson & Perry, 2006). A successful governance structure is one that shares decision-making authority and responsibility for adhering to decisions across the entire group. Although it is essential that agreement is reached when decisions are made, this does not mean that each decision will be identified as the best possible solution for each individual agency.

## **Resiliency**

As collaboratives mature and become increasingly well-established, it is also important for the partnership to consider how adaptive they are to changes in political climate, community needs, funding, and leadership. Strong communication, shared leadership, efficient decision-making and conflict-resolution processes, and a common sense of accountability and responsibility among partners are all important elements in an adaptive collaboration models (Ray, 2002). As the collaborative grows, the vision, mission, and activities of the collaborative may change to reflect emerging community needs or adapt to shifts in funding or the political climate. When decisions are made that affect the core activities of the collaborative, internal and external documents used by the collaborative should be revised to accurately reflect changes in the organization's work.

Over time, the level of involvement across partners and degree to which the work of each agency intersects with the mission of the collaborative may also evolve (Ray, 2002). Agencies who are engaged in a collaborative should recognize that their contribution to the larger effort may change over time. Although each partner must be recognized with equal respect and fairness, successful collaboratives recognize that each partner organization holds a unique role. Whereas some partners may be intimately tied to the key activities of the collaborative, others may contribute less directly. This means that the influence and involvement of each partner may not be equal, but is equitable. Partners can work more effectively and efficiently by focusing their efforts in areas where they can provide the most insight and support.

In addition, partner agencies should expect that their internal policies, procedures, and protocols will also change over time to reflect the work of the collaborative. Although each collaborative partner represents a unique agency with specific goals and purpose, agency-level changes should occur when the work of the collaborative focuses on system change. While maintaining their own autonomy in the services they provide, agencies who fully contribute to the collaborative will begin to make changes to their own policies, procedures, protocols, and priorities that allow the agency to more strongly align with the work of the collaborative.



# Stakeholder perspectives

A number of consistent themes emerged during the key informant interviews conducted with project representatives and the SPCC Board. While stakeholder perspectives varied based on the project they were involved in and their level of involvement, there were more commonalities than differences in their perspectives. Because the purpose of this report was to identify common lessons learned and barriers to implementation, the comments made by stakeholders are included anonymously and most are not identified as related to a specific project. With rare exception, the themes that emerged were noted across projects, but their degree of importance varied. Although the barriers and concerns identified by program stakeholders were fairly consistent across projects, the degree to which these barriers impacted the delivery of services varied considerably. Similarly, while the projects identified similar early accomplishments and observed changes among youth and families, some projects had experienced greater success in meeting their goals than others.

## *Alignment between project goals and activities*

Across all projects and stakeholder groups, there was a common understanding of the intended goals of the three projects identified by the SPCC Board. Those interviewed felt the focus on improved academic achievement and increased family stability is important and addressed both directly and indirectly through program activities.

## **Activities leading to improved academic success and youth safety**

The interviewed stakeholders discussed how their project programming contributes to success in the youth-focused goal areas in two different ways. First, specific program components (i.e., the literacy components of Sankofa, diversion from county services through Ramsey County case management) were components identified as directly tied to academic achievement and increased family stability. However, many of the stakeholders also identified how various program components lead to outcomes that indirectly supported academic achievement and reduced child protection involvement. These goals included helping youth and families develop a stronger sense of cultural self-identity, offering new opportunities to youth and families, empowering families to seek resources and support, helping parents develop effective advocacy skills, providing role models to youth, and facilitating connections between the family and community.

Many stakeholders spoke about the importance of the philosophy and approach of project staff in when providing services to address these goals. Many stakeholders identified building relationships, providing outreach, role modeling, and facilitating connections to

community resources as important ways they provide services and supports to families. A number of stakeholders felt it was important to specify their approach to services emphasizes empowering families to access the resources available in the community, not simply to provide services to the family.

### **Activities leading to systems change**

All projects have worked to enhance their ability to partner with a variety of child-serving systems, including the St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS), Ramsey County Community Human Services, and other community resources, such as libraries and recreational facilities. While some stakeholders felt the projects were helping school staff and other system partners become familiar with community resources, full collaboration between community organizations and established systems has proven difficult.

With representatives from the city, school district, city council, mayor's office and other key systems, the SPCC Board is well-positioned to address policy barriers within systems identified by the projects that contribute to disparities in outcomes or limit the abilities of families to access necessary resources. Some barriers to effective service delivery, including transportation and data sharing practices, have been brought to the SPCC Board through updates from the projects and have resulted in good discussion. However, changing the policies that influence these practices takes time and specific strategies to address these overarching issues have not been identified. One stakeholder noted that the city parks and libraries were starting to work differently with the projects to share resources. Similarly, there are examples of ways county agencies and schools are starting to work differently with the projects. Other barriers to service delivery, such as housing, transportation, the current economic climate, and limited availability of jobs in each neighborhood, are more difficult to address. One stakeholder felt more input from the three projects could help the SPCC Board be more effective in addressing system barriers.

### ***Partnerships between families, programs and systems***

The stakeholders interviewed described their accomplishments and challenges to effective partnership and collaboration at three levels, the: 1) individual level (the relationships between project staff and families); 2) project level (the relationships among project partners); and 3) system level (the relationships between projects and key child-serving systems). At each level, the goals of partnership and strategies used to develop relationships are somewhat different, as are the amount of success each project has experienced.

There is a big difference in what systems, agencies, and individuals perceive as “partnering.”

## **Relationships between program staff and families**

Parent engagement and recruitment was identified by all staff as critical to project success. However, the three projects have taken different approaches to provide outreach and build relationships with families. Direct door-to-door outreach has been used by the East Side Heritage Project to develop relationships with parents in the community. While this grassroots approach can be time-consuming, the project stakeholders felt they have been effective in reaching out to community members. In contrast, parent outreach for Building Future Leaders was initially focused on the students in two schools. To increase the project's reach, an education systems navigator was hired to do more direct outreach to parents living in the North End community. The approach used by Project VOICE follows more of a case management model. Referrals into Project VOICE come primarily through the schools and partner agencies. When a referral is made, an intake appointment is scheduled with the project coordinator to explain the project and services available, and to assess the needs of the child and family. Regardless of the approach taken, the projects have all agreed that one-on-one time with parents is critical to building relationships. One project found outreach through written materials and flyers has not been an effective recruitment strategy.

The amount of time it takes to build a relationship with someone could take a day, a month, or more...no matter the time, that personal connection is the key.

Most stakeholders felt it was incredibly helpful, but not essential, for outreach staff to be African American. Instead, stakeholders felt the approach taken by staff was more important to successfully engaging families. In a variety of ways, project staff stressed the importance of showing empathy and making sure they are talking to families at an equal level. One stakeholder described effective outreach working when it is done with authenticity and care, rather than recruiting parents to meet a certain capacity level. A number of stakeholders recognized that barriers to relationship-building are often due to the past negative experiences parents have had with schools and other county systems. As a result, there is an initial hurdle that must be overcome when parents are first introduced to the project. A number of stakeholders felt their ability to help families access services to meet their immediate needs, not only services that focus on academic achievement, helped the projects appeal to parents and families. However, while the families who participate in each project need help, a number of stakeholders noted that relationships are developed when the strengths of families are recognized instead of focusing primarily on the family's needs.

Parent engagement is difficult if parents don't know or recognize their assets. As a parent, I need to know I'm doing more right than wrong. As staff, we need to celebrate the strengths of the child, parent, and community.

Stakeholders felt long-term relationships with parents and youth and connections they facilitated between families and community resources helped families avoid crises. Project stakeholders also clearly described their approach is to help families connect to services and resources from the community, rather than just providing services to the family. A number of stakeholders clarified they saw their program as a source of long-term support for families:

Social service agencies help address crises, they see families with a problem to solve...when you go in with that kind of vision, it is different than what you do to work with families to get them connected to long term supports.

When you approach the work, you're not there to help the family through a crisis, but to support them through a transformation.

### **Collaboration between project partners**

Within each project, stakeholders spoke positively about one another and their commitments toward youth and families in the community. While many of the partners knew of one another before the projects began, many did not have a history of working collaboratively together. While the level of collaboration between partner organizations varies by project, all felt there were opportunities to work more effectively across agencies and enhance the partnerships already in place.

### **Service coordination**

Youth enrolled in each project may receive services from a single agency or multiple partners. While there are efforts to ensure youth are referred to the types of services and programs they need, overall the level of service coordination across all projects was relatively low. Some organizations were concerned that other partners did not have a clear sense of the service they provide, or that participating organizations all described the project differently. A number of stakeholders did not receive information after making a referral to another service to know whether follow-up occurred. Similarly, partners often did not know which other services the child received through the project. Project VOICE has taken a unique approach by convening care coordination meetings to develop plans for youth and families who are in need of the greatest levels of support. However, due to limited staff time, meetings are held for approximately one-third of the youth they serve.

When there are multiple partners, everyone works differently...everyone has different forms, different ways of working with families. We spent the first year finding out how to dance together.

Everyone has a somewhat different perspective of the project. Everyone had a siloed approach – this is my role and I’ll do that, and all things will work out okay. We realized we needed to become more interconnected because there is crossover and a need for coordination between partners.

The lack of clarity on service coordination also makes it difficult to define what it means to be a participant in each project. While it has been easy for projects to report how many youth and parents participate in a specific program, there seems to be an important distinction between families who are touched by the program through limited interactions, and families who are fully engaged in the project and utilizing the full array of services. Through the end of 2009, a total of 968 youth have been served by all projects combined. However, these totals reflect the number of youth who have received at least some level of services from a project, and the intensity of services each participant receives varies considerably. A few stakeholders were interested in knowing whether families perceive each project as a coordinated effort or simply a way to access different types of resources.

### **Communication across partners**

To varying degrees, stakeholders from all projects identified a need to improve communication between partners. While each project holds regular meetings to share information, many staff across the three projects felt that communication could be enhanced. Some of the issues stakeholders identified as contributing to these difficulties in communication include: lack of reimbursement for indirect coordination time and communication across agencies; varying levels of coordination among partner agencies/organizations; and a reactionary, rather than proactive, response to program issues.

While the programs involved in each project do have staff who are committed to attending project meetings, these activities are covered by in-kind contributions. It can be difficult for staff of some programs to participate in non-reimbursable activities. A larger issue may be the degree to which programs are engaged as full collaborative partners in each project. As discussed previously, although the programs that comprise each project do work in partnership, much of their work continues to occur independently. There may not be a clear understanding of what can and should be communicated across projects, and the process to clearly communicate this information across projects has not been well-established. Finally, a few stakeholders from each project felt that more proactive communication between partners could help avoid or minimize program-level problems. Based on feedback from stakeholders, it seemed that there were opportunities for open communication, but that agencies were used to solving problems independently and did not always bring issues or concerns to the larger stakeholder group. However, perceptions of communication between program partners varied considerably by project.

There is a synergy of the organizations involved and a commitment to the youth who live in the community. We have some authentic dialogue when we are together and can speak to the issues happening in the collaborative and do collective decision-making.

In some ways, there have been blocks between the programs. Lines of communication aren't always open and there is a hierarchy in place. At each tier, there needs to be trust and respect.

## **Relationships between project partners and systems**

Across all projects, stakeholders discussed the importance of building relationships with school staff at all levels (administration, teachers, and social workers) to ensure buy-in. Most felt that school social workers and other staff did not have the time or resources to reach out to the community, so the projects needed to be active in reaching out to them and maintaining relationships. Some stakeholders spoke about strong connections with individual teachers, while others felt there was confusion among school staff regarding the project and the services they provide. Overall, project stakeholders agreed that it takes considerable time and effort to build relationships with schools and county agencies.

Coordination with county agencies has also had mixed results for the two projects (BFL and Project VOICE) who have attempted to work with county agencies to provide on-site services for youth and families. While both projects felt that early connections to county case managers has helped families receive more timely access to services, communication between partners can be inconsistent. Data sharing concerns, as well as the hiring and service delivery practices of specific agencies, poses challenges. For example, one stakeholder noted that although the community-based county case manager could refer a family to a specific service and provide some assistance for the family to apply for support, the family still needed to apply for the support at the county office. However, another stakeholder pointed out that there are also times system partners can be more flexible because they have greater access to resources.

There are things in the African American community that are not fully understood by traditional systems. When you look at the outreach that happens from the county or state...they don't recognize the barriers families have to accessing what they need. The county sees resources in place and wonders why people aren't taking advantage of it...With this program, creating access and new pathways to systems is one way to help [families access resources]. Participants can tap into resources through someone they know and trust.

## **Relationships between projects**

Regular meetings are held with representatives of the three projects to discuss common concerns and participate in joint planning for evaluation and sustainability. These joint efforts have led to greater familiarity of resources across St. Paul among project stakeholders and opportunities to share lessons learned and implementation strategies. In addition, representatives from each project have discussed shared communication strategies to increase recognition of the three projects across St. Paul and committed to seeking opportunities to seek funding together. Despite these efforts to coordinate at a project administration level, there is less coordination between projects at the service-delivery level. A few stakeholders felt there could be opportunities to work together to address transportation issues or to provide more opportunities for parents. There was also recognition among a few stakeholders that the work of the projects naturally overlaps because youth often attend school in a different neighborhood than where they live. While it would likely be beneficial to build stronger referral networks between projects, most stakeholders emphasized service coordination and communication within each project, rather than across projects, as an immediate need.

## ***Use of culturally-specific approaches in service delivery***

One of the most important and unique characteristics of these projects is their focus on culturally-specific programming. Within each project, participants are offered opportunities to learn about their cultural history, develop relationships with African American role models, and build connections to the community. Instead of culturally-specific services being a stand-alone piece of their work, many program stakeholders spoke of their commitment to the community and described the cultural focus of their approach as a part of their overarching philosophy in working with youth and families. When culturally-specific approaches are used, stakeholders felt they helped youth and parents develop a greater sense of cultural self-identity, a sense of optimism in their future, and deeper connections to the community. The culturally-specific strategies used by each project fell into three main categories: the integration of cultural concepts into specific services, use of mentors and informal role models, and emphasis on building a stronger community network.

## **Integration of culture into services**

Many of the programs involved in each project place a strong emphasis on teaching youth about African and African American culture. The organizations providing these services are established in the community, not new organizations attempting to adapt their programs to reach a specific population. These programs may offer youth and families

opportunities to participate in specific cultural activities (i.e., African drumming, introductions to African language), or to learn about culture indirectly (i.e., reading books, participating in group discussions). Most of the program partners have a mission or guiding program philosophy that describes their emphasis on culture. A few stakeholders stressed the importance of culturally-specific approaches being embedded into the work of the project, not an adaptation or accommodation of a traditional approach to services delivery.

With Sankofa, Project Kofi, and other programs, the focus on history, culture, and self-identity helps ground the kids in different ways.

We've pulled in more cultural pieces and many of our programs have a strong cultural focus, but we need to be more strategic around this. It isn't enough to put on a dashiki and celebrate kwanza. It's a component of what we're trying to do, but it isn't enough.

While culturally-specific approaches were embedded into standard practice among community-based partner organizations, schools and other systems may need to look at ways they can offer their set of services to an increasingly diverse population in St. Paul. A number of stakeholders noted that the demographic characteristic in many St. Paul schools has changed considerably over time, while the faculty has remained predominately White. As a result, teachers need to find new ways to engage an increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse student body.

If we don't provide culturally-specific support to families, a portion of the teaching tools and strategies used [by teachers] won't be as effective.

The school is working on strategies to increase cultural competency, but it will take time to see how those efforts lead to changes among kids.

## **Role models**

A number of stakeholders noted the youth participating in the projects often came from disrupted homes and did not have strong male role models in their lives. Within each program, there are formal mentoring programs, opportunities for youth to receive one-on-one attention from African American program staff, or group activities that focus on developing goals, making good decisions, and avoiding conflict. Adult role models and mentors can provide guidance and encouragement to youth. Stakeholders felt it was important for youth to hear adults speak openly and honestly about the challenges they faced growing up, not only their achievements and successes. Some program representatives felt it was challenging to find enough African American mentors and were frustrated that some adults with important stories to share with youth cannot serve as mentors because of past criminal involvement.



Having staff that look like their clients is really important.

### **Connections to the community**

Although individual youth and caregivers are the primary service recipients in each project, program stakeholders consistently spoke about their work in the context of the broader community. According to one stakeholder, the African American concept of community is centered narrowly around cultural identity but includes all African American individuals from children to elders, African American organizations, religious institutions and other organizations or entities that are part of the community. There is a commitment to children within the community, but the needs of children are not considered in isolation. There is a strong sense of interconnectedness within the community that must be taken into account when needs are assessed and services are offered to families. Across all projects, staff have a strong sense of commitment and responsibility toward the community and feel one of the most important aspects of their work is supporting or enhancing the resources available within the community, and helping families develop strong ties within the community.

There is a difference in how things are now and how they used to be done. When parents come to events, they remember how things used to happen in their families, and it builds a stronger sense of self. There are things as a community we are trying to restore.

Changing young people means we are also changing the community.

This is supposed to be a systems change project. What that means to us, is that the fabric of our community must be stronger. The connections within and extending from the community to and from systems must be stronger.

### ***Parent/youth outcomes***

A number of stakeholders felt it was too early to know how well the projects were working. While they felt they were doing the right types of activities to support youth and families, they did not know whether their work was going to ultimately result in academic gains for children and an improved home environment for the child and family. While the stakeholders agreed these were important goals to focus on, there was some concern that these outcomes are difficult to change and the less tangible factors that also influence school achievement and family stability are challenging to measure.

Although it is too early to report evaluation outcomes for youth and parents enrolled in each project, a number of program stakeholders described changes they were seeing in the individual youth and parents they work with. Some of the common outcomes

observed by staff across all three projects included a greater sense of hope and optimism among youth and parents, improvements in students' academic achievement, and greater parent involvement and engagement in the community.

Staff from each project also gave examples of positive changes they had noticed among youth and parent participants. According to East Side Heritage Project staff, parents who participate present themselves differently, some have gotten jobs, and others have become more engaged with the community center by volunteering their time. Stakeholders also noted children making academic strides as a result of their involvement with Sankofa and the mentoring program, PACE. BFL stakeholders felt they were starting to see greater parent involvement in schools, as well as youth developing a greater sense of pride as they learn how to read. Similarly, Project VOICE stakeholders identified parents becoming more involved in their child's school and engaged in accessing resources to support their family. Some stakeholders also gave examples of students behaving better in the classroom, developing new interests and hobbies, and improving peer social skills.

If we can have kids excited about who they are and what they are learning, we've come a long way. If [youth have] a sense of awe and an ability to explore freely – that's what we're working towards. We're getting there.

As we hear stories about youth and parents, there is a lot of value that comes through self-confidence and self-awareness. That allows parents to navigate the system more effectively, and likely lead to other outcomes...those are the things that are harder to measure and quantify.

A few stakeholders pointed out that while the partners from each project are working together to help facilitate changes among youth and parents, the actions of families lead to changes in outcomes.

## ***Implementation accomplishments and barriers***

### **Early accomplishments**

Across all projects, stakeholders identified the new relationships being formed across organizations and systems as a key accomplishment. These partnerships help the projects offer a comprehensive array of services and resources to families, greater than what one agency or provider could do on its own. The partners also felt the working with other agencies helped them reach families who would not have otherwise sought out their services. While acknowledging that more can be done to enhance these partnerships, most representatives were pleased with the relationships they were developing.

The improved coordination between schools and community-based organizations was also considered an early accomplishment by some stakeholders. Although the degree of coordination between each project and individual schools varies, stakeholders felt the growing coordination between schools and community-based organizations will help schools become better equipped to meet the needs of African American students. A few stakeholders felt that school staff did not have a strong understanding of their project and their work could be seen as competition to what schools are doing independently. However, most individuals felt these partnerships were promising and could be expanded.

Project stakeholders also felt their efforts were making a difference in communities that lack resources and have been hurt by the economy. Some stakeholders felt the projects' outreach efforts are helping families who have been isolated in the community have better access to support and resources. Building Future Leaders stakeholders felt they were helping families access resources in an area that has been underserved and void of many services and opportunities for youth.

Finally, the project stakeholders felt they were starting to see how their work is leading to changes among youth and families. A number of stakeholders interviewed identified early indications of improved reading and classroom behavior among youth, and indications of greater parent participation in school. Some project partners felt they were helping families avoid or minimize crises by connecting them with community resources, though they felt this was difficult to prove. Many stakeholders described other anecdotal evidence of youth and parents having greater self-confidence, better ties to the community, and more hope and optimism for their future.

### **Implementation barriers**

A number of common environmental, system, and program barriers were also identified by the stakeholders interviewed. Many of these barriers have been discussed within each project, and have come to the attention of the SPPC Board through regular project updates.

### **Current economic climate**

Changes in the state and national economy have had a major impact on the stability of families who live in the three neighborhoods targeted through these interventions. Stakeholders noted housing and employment as major issues that families are concerned about. A number of project staff noted that families are struggling to meet their basic needs. For example, one school representative noted that more children were participating in their breakfast program, while a case worker noticed an increase in referrals through the schools that seemed to indicate families were having more difficulties. While each project can provide some support to families in crisis situations

through referrals to informal partners, such as the Family Resource Center at North End Elementary, none of the programs providing direct services are equipped with the resources to offer emergency assistance, job training, or housing support to families. There was recognition that the responses to these concerns need to come from larger systems. However, one stakeholder suggested greater use of flexible discretionary funds by programs could be a way to provide greater assistance to families.

I don't think we anticipated...the severity of the economic crisis. It has made all systems and organizations less able to respond. All are in crisis mode and all programs are working with families who are in crisis.

When you're really stuck, you might need a tow-truck to first pull you out.

## **Transportation**

Each project does have a primary site where a number of resources are available to parents. However, not all programs are run out of the host site, and some are less accessible by major bus routes than others. One stakeholder pointed out that the transportation issue is further complicated by students attending a variety of schools, which may not be located in their neighborhoods. All projects offer a combination of school-based and community-based services. However, it can be challenging to determine when and where to offer programming so that it is most accessible to youth.

East Side Heritage Project does have a van it can use for activities, or to provide transportation to specific services. Other options, such as taxi vouchers or bus cards, can help families have the financial resources they need to get to various services. However, the development of better public transportation system is a broader issue in the city and Twin Cities Metro.

## **Financial sustainability**

Representatives from all projects, as well as the SPCC Board, are concerned about the sustainability of the Tri-Project effort. Currently, LCTS funds are being used to pay for most of the services. However, this funding stream cannot be used for some important infrastructure elements, such as administrative duties, communication/coordination between partners, and evaluation. LCTS funding has been reduced at the federal level and, subsequently, fewer local dollars are available. The SPCC Board does not see LCTS funding as a guaranteed source of revenue, and is concerned about what may happen if this funding is further reduced or eliminated completely.

A sustainability committee has been established with representatives from across the three projects to identify potential funding sources or other opportunities for revenue.

While philanthropic support has been sought, the economy has reduced the availability of grants to nonprofit agencies. There are concerns that while local foundations and other grant-making organizations may be interested in supporting specific services or nonprofit agency partners, they have been hesitant to provide grants to these projects because the SPPS and SPCC, both considered government entities, are partners in each initiative. However, stakeholders also recognized the involvement and support of the SPCC and SPPS district may be advantageous for seeking other competitive grants. While grants may offer a short-term funding solution, stakeholders felt that foundations usually focused on short-term, innovative services, and would be unlikely to provide long-term support for the projects.

African American communities are used to seeing services come in and leave 3 to 5 years later. That's why there is a major trust issue with systems...the families are used to being abandoned.

### **Data sharing**

Despite representation of the SPPS district and Ramsey County Community Human Services on committees and partnerships between these systems and individual projects, data sharing practices continue to be cumbersome and confusing to project staff. Requests for information may be initiated or responded to somewhat differently by school representatives or county case managers, leading to some service delivery problems. For example, while the case manager working with Project VOICE communicates new referrals regularly to the project coordinator, the case manager working with BFL receives referrals from the school and works independently with the child and family. While she tells youth and parents about the program, it becomes the responsibility of the family to follow through on the referral.

While each project has, or is developing, release forms to share individual participant information, broader data sharing agreements, such as business associate agreements, have not been used to enhance communication between systems and project partners. A coordinated effort to work with various systems to develop these approaches may be more effective than each project working independently to establish data sharing agreements.

It's tough to have the glue – politically and organizationally – to keep things moving forward. With children, there are a number of barriers [to working together]: privacy and confidentiality, school mandates and requirements, student mobility. It takes more than an agreement for organizations to work together.

### **Flexibility in service delivery, staffing patterns**

Because of partnerships between county agencies and individual projects, on-site county services are available to participants of two programs, Project VOICE and BFL. However, some county staffing and service delivery practices have not been as flexible. County case managers can refer families for a variety of programs and services, but program applications must still be filed at the designated county location during their standard office hours. While families receive support to help them get connected with appropriate services, program enrollment is not a seamless one-step process.

The staffing practices of county agencies and the school district may also impact the effectiveness of service delivery. Most stakeholders agree that, while it is helpful for service providers who work for these programs to be African American, services can be effectively provided by staff of any race/ethnicity. Currently, within each project, services are provided primarily, but not exclusively, by African American staff. Some stakeholders wondered if parent outreach and utilization of county services would have been more effective in the earlier stages of each project if done by African American staff.

### **Project leadership, infrastructure, vision**

Two of the projects (Building Future Leaders and Project VOICE) have experienced changes in project leadership. Stakeholders from both programs felt these early changes led to some confusion among partners, and a loss of shared vision and momentum. All projects also felt communication was hampered by a lack of staff time and different expectations among partners. While additional funding to support the work of a coordinator or administrative time among partners may help address this barrier, additional discussion is needed to determine how staff envision the coordination of services to take place and their roles and responsibilities when collaborating with other programs. A few stakeholders also expressed concerns that the projects need to develop a shared vision of their goals, and the role and responsibility of each partner meeting these goals, among all partners from direct service staff to system representatives. Some partners did not feel all partners were consistent when describing the services available through each project, and a few stakeholders felt a deeper conversation about the role the project plays within the community is needed.

### **Time**

Although stakeholders from all project agreed direct outreach to youth and parents was the best way to engage families in services, relationship-building through face-to-face contact takes time. While a more centralized intake and referral process helps parents build relationships with the project and can potentially lead to improved communication across partners, this approach also requires significant time by staff. Across all three

projects, additional administrative support has been added to assist the outreach and intake staff with paperwork and other tasks. Because LCTS funding can not be used for these types of activities, this additional assistance comes through in-kind support.

My day doesn't necessary end at 5 p.m. Families need me when other [traditional] services are not available.

## **Evaluation**

Although an evaluation committee was established early in the project, evaluation activities could not be paid for using LCTS dollars and other funding was not obtained until Fall 2009. As a result, the projects have lost an opportunity to gather information to describe the outcomes of services among participants, especially those involved during the first year of funding. All projects are now developing steps to gather informed consent from participating parents so that system level outcome data (school test scores, disciplinary data, and human services involvement status) can be used for evaluation purposes. The projects report this task of going back to parents to obtain informed consent has been challenging because of logistical reasons, and because parents are hesitant about releasing data from the school and human services department. While project staff will continue to work with families to obtain informed consent for the evaluation, there is some concern about the number of families who will ultimately participate.

# Conclusions and recommendations

The information gathered through the key informant interviews highlighted a number of key lessons learned during the first 18 months of the projects. Some of the most important accomplishments and areas of concern include:

- **Culturally-appropriate approaches show promise in engaging and supporting youth and families.** The stakeholders interviewed for this report felt a unique and important aspect of all three projects was their focus on creating opportunities for youth and families to learn about African and African American culture and develop connections to the African American community. The projects integrate culture as a central part of, rather than a supplemental component to, the services they provide.
- **Significant time and effort is needed to develop relationships with families and build connections within the African American community.** Staff from all projects made it clear that their role was not only to provide services to the family, but to support the youth and family in becoming engaged in the African American community. In order to do this, outreach activities are necessary to reach out to families living within each target neighborhood and relationships between partners and other community resources must be enhanced. Both of these activities take considerable time, but are considered critical to developing a strong community network.
- **Additional support to projects around infrastructure expectations and data sharing practices may help program implementation.** Across all projects, it took much longer to implement the program than anticipated. To varying degrees all projects are still working through a variety of implementation issues, including ways to enhance communication and coordination between partners through informal pathways and data sharing practices. Given the number of partners involved in each project, additional planning time and greater guidance during the planning process may have helped the projects move into service delivery with fewer issues to resolve. Similarly, data sharing has been a topic of discussion since the programs began to receive funding. Additional support to each project and convening of all key partners earlier in the implementation phase may have helped resolve these issues earlier.
- **While interagency partnerships have been established, full collaboration has not occurred.** Some of the points of tension identified in the key informant interviews around decision-making and communication indicate the projects are not working collaboratively. Although collaboration and cooperation are terms often used interchangeably, they reflect different levels of interagency interactions and coordination. Agencies that cooperate can be thought of as having overlapping goals



and informal partnerships with one another. As agencies move to collaboration, there is a full sharing of resources, authority, and benefits. Although a number of stakeholders may be interested in working together to address a shared concern, many groups find it difficult to enter true collaborative partnerships where there are common goals, mutually-understood relationships, and sharing of decision-making authority, accountability, and resources.

- **Sustainability strategies are needed, especially in order to support project leadership and infrastructure.** A number of stakeholders were concerned about the ongoing sustainability of these projects, especially given how often resources are brought into African American communities for only short periods of time. The activities that facilitate coordination across agencies and outreach to communities seem particularly difficult to sustain, as most funding streams are dedicated to direct services and programming.

Building on the projects' accomplishments and developing strategies to address ongoing challenges may be helpful to each project in moving forward, as well as to the Board as it considers ways to support both current projects now and those they fund in the future. Based on the information gathered during this qualitative evaluation, Wilder Research has developed the following recommendations for the SPCC Board and funded projects:

- **Develop clear strategies to improve communication across project partners.** To varying degrees, all projects identified a need to improve both formal and informal communication across partners. Formal strategies are likely needed to develop ways to share what occurs after an interagency referral is made. New reports from the Access database could be developed that identify which parents and youth begin to receive new services each month, or other direct communication between partner agencies could occur. There also seems to be interest in improving informal communication across partners. While there seemed to be great willingness among partners to coordinate with one another, a number of stakeholders felt all programs were used to working independently to sort out problems. While time is reserved during meetings to discuss larger issues, greater informal communication through brief phone calls or emails could enhance the relationships between partners.
- **Clarify data sharing procedures across programs, as well as between programs and systems.** Data sharing practices continue to be an area of some confusion across all projects. In order to more clearly define the data sharing practices that need to be in place, it is important to clearly identify the types of information that must be shared. The requirements necessary to share Protected Health Information (PHI) under HIPAA and FERPA are quite cumbersome. However, less formal data sharing practices are necessary for communication not covered under these federal

regulations. There may be opportunities for the SPCC Board to provide greater training and support to each project, in order for all partners to have a clear sense of what types of information they can share with one another.

- **Consider using a self-assessment to determine ways to increase collaboration within each project and across the Tri-Project Initiative.** In a review of cross-disciplinary literature describing effective collaboration, 20 factors were identified that influence the success of collaborative efforts. Some of these factors include shared vision, communication, decision-making, and resiliency to changes in the political or economic climate. Although this study identified some areas where improvements could be made to increase collaboration across projects, a more comprehensive self-assessment that incorporates feedback from all project staff and stakeholders could help each project more clearly define its strengths and weaknesses, and identify strategies to address these issues.
  
- **Continue conversations to define and describe how culturally-specific approaches are being used throughout the Tri-Project Initiative and contribute to improved outcomes.** As mentioned previously, an emphasis on culture and building community networks is an integral part of the three projects. However, it is unclear whether there is a shared understanding of how this philosophy guides the work of program staff, and how it contributes to improved outcomes among youth and parents. Just as it is important for all partners to develop strategies to share information about their work with individual clients, there is interest in ensuring all partners and stakeholders have the same shared vision of their collaborative work and the ability to clearly articulate the importance and impact of using of culturally-specific approaches when communicating with potential community partners and funders. Further, ongoing documentation of lessons learned through these projects can be shared with schools and other systems to help them develop strategies to provide more effective services to African American families.

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# Appendix

*Characteristics of projects funded*

*Stakeholders interviewed*



## *Stakeholders interviewed*

A total of 28 stakeholders were interviewed for this project. Most interviews were conducted as one-on-one interviews, but some projects did have multiple staff participate in a single interview. The stakeholders interviewed were identified by the Tri-Project Team and evaluation subcommittee as key representatives of each project and the SPCC Board.

<b>Project</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>
<b>Building Future Leaders</b>		
	Jolene Mason	Building Future Leaders
	Rosemary Enslin	SPPS/Building Future Leaders
	Nancy Satchel	SPPS
	Anna Young	Ramsey County Social Services
	Atum Azzahir	Cultural Wellness Center
	Hamilton Bell	North End Elementary School
<b>East Side Heritage Project</b>		
	Mary Nestingen	East Side Heritage Project/Merrick Community Center
	Katie Samples	AAAL
	Clyde Turner	PACE
	Phil Larkin	PACE
	Joell Dixon	PACE
	Dedric Payne	East Side Heritage Project
	Jennifer Watson	East Side Heritage Project
<b>Project VOICE</b>		
	DonEster Miller	Project VOICE
	Lou Walker Thompson	Project VOICE
	Don Francis	Project Kofi
	Denise King	Project Kofi
	Christina McCoy	YWCA
	Jonathan Palmer	Hallie Q. Brown Community Center
	Jen McConnel	Ramsey County Social Services
	Rob Fulton	Ramsey County Public Health
<b>Involved with all projects</b>		
	Gevonee Ford	NdCAD
	Hannatu Green	NdCAD
	Christa Anders	Advance Consulting
	Laurie Davis	Advance Consulting
	Lee Helgen	SPCC Board
	Elona Street-Stewart	SPCC Board
	Mary Kay Boyd	SPCC Board

## *Characteristics of projects funded by the Saint Paul Children’s Collaborative*

	<b>Building Future Leaders</b>	<b>East Side Heritage Project</b>	<b>Project VOICE</b>
Lead Partners	Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD), St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS), Ramsey County Human Services, Rice Street Library, Cultural Wellness Center	Merrick Community Services, African American Academy for Accelerated Learning, NdCAD, Past Athletes Concerned about Education (PACE), St. Paul Park & Rec, Ramsey County Human Services	Hallie Q Brown Community Center, YWCA, Ramsey County, NdCAD, Project KOFI/Wilder Foundation, Cultural Wellness Center, Walker West Music Academy, SPPS
<b>Geographic Focus</b>	<b>North End</b>	<b>East Side</b>	<b>Summit-University/Frogtown</b>
Summary	A collaboration of the North End community of St. Paul. Brings together expertise and resources to improve academic achievement for African American boys, increase access to referrals, provide mentoring opportunities through the research based “Chosen to Achieve” program and lend parent education support in an effort to improve child safety, improve school success and eliminate system barriers. The East Side Family Center provides support for parents (assistance with food, housing, employment).	The East Side Heritage Project offers a multifaceted approach that impacts the emotional, physical and intellectual needs of African American boys. The core elements will be mentoring, tutoring and cultural awareness for African American boys ages 5-14, and parent involvement. Parents will also be part of leadership training for systems change. Merrick Community Center offers emergency assistance, food shelves, case management, employment services and community events.	A service hub in the Summit-University/Frogtown neighborhood that links Ramsey County services and services provided by community agencies, in partnership with our local schools, to create an effective and seamless network of support for African American boys and girls in K-8 and their families. Ideas and solutions voiced by the African American community are fundamental to this new paradigm for a strength-based family-centered approach to service delivery. Hallie Q Brown has case management, afterschool programs, food and clothing assistance, and community events.
Key Staff	Education Systems Navigator Ramsey County Social Worker	Parent liaison/outreach worker Youth worker	Project Coordinator Ramsey County Child Protection Worker, Economic Assistance Worker and Public Health Nurse

The projects are community-driven, and therefore involve a variety of activities, but all three include the following core activities/strategies:

- **Parent engagement and empowerment:** Through a series of classes offered at nights and on weekends, parents are taught to support and advocate for their children, including:
  - Building literacy skills
  - Increasing cultural awareness and positive identity



- Accessing community resources to empower themselves and their children, including: economic assistance/jobs; health insurance and health services, including mental health services; and information on accessing educational services/supports.
- **Tutoring:** each project involves the same Afro-centric, research-based literacy enrichment program that is aligned with the St. Paul Public Schools academic standards.
- **Mentoring:** several models are used, all engaging community members as mentors using existing mentoring programs to provide training and support. The mentoring approaches recruit former athletes, members of faith communities, and others to provide one-on-one connections and long-term successful relationships to participating youth.
- **Case management:** social workers, family support workers and other trained staff provide participating families with support in effectively accessing and coordinating services and support, as well as collecting evaluation data to assess the projects' effectiveness.