

# Practices To Keep In After-School and Youth Programs



## Tailor Made:

Attracting, Engaging, and Retaining Hard-to-Reach Youth



**YDI**

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE



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Established in 1991 in New York City, the Youth Development Institute (YDI) is one of a growing number of intermediary organizations throughout the United States that seek to create a cohesive community infrastructure to support the positive development of youth. YDI approaches its work with an understanding of and a respect for the complexities of young people's lives and the critical role of youth-serving organizations in supporting young people's growth and development.

YDI's mission is to increase the capacity of communities to support the development of young people. YDI provides technical assistance, conducts research, and assists policy-makers in developing more effective approaches to support and offer opportunities to young people. At the core of YDI's work is a research-based approach to youth development. This work is asset-based in focusing on the strengths of young people, organizations and their staff. It seeks to bring together all of the resources in the lives of young people—school, community, and family—to build coherent and positive environments. The youth development framework identifies five principles that have been found to be present when youth, especially those with significant obstacles in their lives, achieve successful adulthood:

- Close relationships with adults
- High expectations
- Engaging activities
- Opportunities for contribution
- Continuity of adult supports over time

The Youth Development Institute (YDI) also strengthens non-profit organizations and public agencies and builds programs that address gaps in services, in New York City and nationally. It provides training and on-site technical assistance, conducts research, develops practice and policy innovations, and supports advocacy. This work enables organizations and agencies to apply the most promising lessons from research and practice so that they operate efficiently and the young people they serve grow and develop through powerful, sustained, and joyful experiences. YDI helps organizations to design their programs based on sound knowledge about what works and provides their leaders and staff with the information and skills to implement these strategies effectively. YDI addresses gaps in youth services by developing new programs and policies in areas and for populations that are addressed inadequately.

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# 1

## Introduction

# 1. INTRODUCTION

*Practices to Keep In After-School and Youth Programs* is a series of documentation reports that highlight successful approaches in Beacons, which are community centers in school buildings that combine youth and community development to support young people, families, and neighborhoods. Developed for Beacons, these approaches are also widely used in the expanding world of After-School and Youth Programs.

The reports demonstrate how local ingenuity applied to key issues over time can leverage individual, neighborhood, and policy change. They contain ideas for practitioners to adapt to their own programs and for policymakers who seek practical responses to critical concerns—literacy and academic support for youth, preparation for work and participation in the labor force, strengthening families and preventing foster care placement, and creating opportunities to play important roles that strengthen the fabric of community social organization.

## *The Beacons Movement and After-School Programming*

Beacons were first established in New York City in 1991 as part of the Safe Cities Safe Streets program. Located in schools and operated by community-based organizations with core funding provided by New York City, the Beacons represent an innovative collaboration between the public and non-profit sectors to turn the school building into a true public resource. Today, more than 100 Beacons in five cities offer education, recreation, adult education, arts, and family programming after school, before school, on weekends, and during vacations. In New York City, Beacons serve more than 150,000 children, youth, and adults annually. Nationally they reach more than 250,000 individuals in San Francisco, Minneapolis, Denver, and West Palm Beach, Florida.

The Beacons forge partnerships across public, non-profit, and private institutions to fortify neighborhoods. They create pathways for participation between age groups and a continuum of programming that promotes healthy development and strong families. They contribute to local economic development by providing jobs to young people and adults. They help to make neighborhoods safe and connect residents to each other and to local resources. At a time when social services are increasingly located outside of the communities that need them, the Beacons serve as a hub for an array of social and educational supports.

Funding for the Beacon programs described in *Practices to Keep* comes from a wide variety of sources. The range demonstrates a commitment by both the public and private sectors to the comprehensive work of Beacons, with support located in education, labor, child welfare, and human services. Sources include:

- Local tax levy
- Local, state, and federal foster care
- Private foundations
- Public-school dollars
- State after-school funding sources
- Summer Youth Employment Program (OTDA, US DOL)
- Supplemental Education Services, part of No Child Left Behind (US DOE)
- 21st Century Community Learning Centers (US DOE)

- Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention (NYSOYD)
- Workforce Investment Act: In-School Youth; Out-of-School Youth; Literacy (USDOL)

The need for the Beacons and other programs that build on similar principles is more urgent today than ever. The economic crisis that began in 2008 has affected every sector of society, but will inevitably hit hardest in poor communities where the Beacons are located. Too often, services are removed from the very neighborhoods where they are needed most. The Beacons place services in the center of poor communities. The gains that the Beacons help create must be protected, as the need for comprehensive and coordinated services, high quality education and work preparation, and community safety increases. The Beacons have earned the trust and respect of local residents and provide a tested infrastructure for attaching additional or consolidated programs.

*Practices to Keep In After-School and Youth Programs* illustrates how Beacons provide young people with pathways to increasingly responsible roles, involve youth and adults in improving their communities, and create environments of support to keep families together.

# 2

## **Tailor Made:**

Attracting, Engaging, and Retaining Hard-to-Reach Youth



## 2. TAILOR MADE

### *Introduction*

Emmanuel, a junior at Leadership High School in San Francisco, enjoys hanging out with his friends and girl friend, appreciates a variety of musical genres and does just well enough in school to get by. Like most of his friends, he never participated in after-school activities or joined any clubs, and spent most of his free time just hanging out.

A first generation Mexican American and the middle child and only boy of eight sisters, Emmanuel said that until last year he found what he needed—companionship and understanding—on the streets. “A typical day after school would have been me smoking a lot of weed while hanging out with my friends on the streets and doing nothing but getting into trouble.” That was until he found Tailor Made, an after-school program run by the local OMI/Excelsior Beacon (a school-based community center housed in the same building as his high school).

Leadership High School is a small charter high school with an emphasis on college prep and leadership development that is located in James Denman Middle School. With 576 students, the majority of which are new Chinese and Latin American (from Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala) immigrants, along with Filipinos, African Americans, and Asian Pacific Islanders (Samoan), Denman serves a population that is 24% English language learners and 66% of who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

The Beacon is an integral part of Denman and the surrounding community, and has been housed in the school since 1999, when it was founded by community leaders, the school’s principal at the time, and the Urban Services YMCA. The Beacon is located in a neighborhood between two dis-

tinct, but very diverse communities: OMI (Oceanview, Merced, Ingleside) and Excelsior.

Last year, Denman got a new principal, Han Phung-Ngoc. She says that her approach to education is based in social justice, equity, and access to high quality education for all students. She strongly supports the Beacon and has become an active partner in its work. “There are so many advantages of having a Beacon in our school. This is symbolized by the wellness program which is a huge partnership and provides an invaluable resource,” said Principal Han. “I think that for many of our kids, if not for Beacon they would be outside on the street.”

### *The Wellness Program*

Using combined funding from a contract with the San Francisco Department of Public Health, the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF—the lead city partner for the SF Beacon Initiative), and a patchwork of private grants, the OMI/Excelsior Beacon has developed a comprehensive wellness program that is unique across Beacons in San Francisco. Operated by the Urban Services YMCA, the social services arm of the YMCA San Francisco, the Beacon is able to offer a myriad of free programs and wellness services to students and their families.

Initially a handful of unrelated health and wellness services, the wellness program has grown to fit the needs of students and their families. “The wellness program’s progressions and layers of programming grew in response to the needs of the youth we were serving. As our case managers and staff worked with our kids, it became clear that many of their behavioral and at times emotional issues were related to a host of factors such as substance abuse, trauma, gang affiliation, problems at home, etc. To help them deal with these

issues, we needed to provide them with services in real time while continuing our relationship with them and assessing their progress. To do this we had to work closely with the youth to make sure they received all the services they needed rather than referring them out to other agencies. Locating all the services in one place—or with a partner organization—allowed us to keep the kids close while serving their greater individual needs,” explained David MacGillis, Associate Executive Director of Urban Services YMCA and Beacon Director. “Many of the youth we work with are high-need and needed more than just individual case management or a referral. They, and often times their families, needed a collection of services.”

The current wellness program includes a range of services designed to provide young people with support that mitigates challenging life circumstances. These include: individual case management, substance use prevention, wellness counseling, trauma therapy, peer-led health education, empowerment and life skills groups, gang intervention and juvenile justice prevention, a wellness resource library, and parent/family support services.

With three core staff, the program houses a full-time Director of Case Management, a full-time Gang Prevention Case Manager, and a School-based Case Manager. Additionally, there is a substance abuse counselor contracted through a partner organization, the Balboa Teen Health Center located next to the school. Students have access to a full-time trauma therapist and several part time staff for workshops and prevention activities. The trauma therapist is located at the Beacon and is provided by the lead agency as part of the Medicare/Medical services available to Denman students and their families.<sup>1</sup>

The case management aspect of the program has a three-pronged approach: individual support, group support, as well as referrals and community connections. In addition, each case manager focuses on a different group of students.

The School-based Case Manager focuses on Beacon participants—mostly Denman middle school students—who have been in contact with the juvenile justice system or are at-risk and demonstrate behavior needing intervention. He works closely with the school counselors to identify, assess, and manage the progress of the students referred to him. Working with about 30 students during the course of the year, he also runs two Tailor Made groups where he supports additional students. The largest portion of his caseload comprises referrals from teachers, counselors, and Beacons staff. “The school works very closely with the case manager and regularly refers students to him. They see him as another staff person,” said one of the counselors at Denman.

Another case manager focuses on gang prevention, early gang intervention, and responses to community violence. Working primarily with Asian Pacific Islander youth,<sup>2</sup> he also manages individual cases, runs Tailor Made groups, and does presentations at schools in the community. Although he is based at the OMI/Excelsior Beacon, he works with three other schools and does street outreach to youth who are not in school.

Finally, the Director of Case Management oversees the case managers, does individual case management, runs Tailor Made groups at the high-school level, and works with older youth on job readiness.<sup>3</sup> All case managers refer students for counseling services as needed.

<sup>1</sup>Due to budget cuts in the State of California in 2009, funding has been cut and half of these positions are in jeopardy.

<sup>2</sup>This subcontract is provided by the China Town Youth Center as part of their Crisis Response Network to work with Asian Pacific Islander youth.

<sup>3</sup>Funding for this comes from mayor’s office via a federal block grant.

## *The Tailor Made Concept*

Tailor Made is one in the series of wrap-around services offered by the Beacon as part of the comprehensive wellness program. Designed for middle- and high-school students, Tailor Made uses a group setting to work with vulnerable and at-risk students to develop life skills, healthy decision-making, anger management, work readiness, and a host of other healthy life behaviors.

Developed by Will Corpuz, now Director of Case Management, Tailor Made was modeled after a similar program, United Playaz, in another part of the city developed by his brother Rudy which is showing success in reaching vulnerable adolescents.

In the 1990's, Corpuz, a first-generation immigrant of Filipino descent, experienced first-hand the effects of increased violence in his neighborhood and communities across San Francisco, and "attended far too many funerals of friends and families caught up in gang violence." In response to the violence, he and several of his brothers made a vow to "silence the violence" and work to bring the community together.

It was during this time that Corpuz, then working at the Community Bridges Beacon in the Mission District, began to make connections with many of the young people in the neighborhood who directly felt the impact of the violence, yet were still attracted to gang membership and the perceived benefits it promised them. Several years later, when he took the job of case manager at the OMI/Excelsior Beacon Center, he came to understand why the young people he worked with were attracted to gang life and how, despite the negative association, gang membership met many of their needs such as making money, earning respect and finding a sense of family/belonging. From this he saw the need to develop a set of interventions that would provide the young people

in the OMI and the Excelsior neighborhoods of San Francisco an alternative to gang membership.

Tailor Made was developed as the afterschool/group aspect of these interventions. Seeking to attract disengaged youth not typically interested in joining traditional after-school programs, Tailor Made creates an empowering and respectful group setting in which youth can support each other in a safe, confidential space. The program's structure and approach is designed to reach youth who are at risk of entering the juvenile justice system, joining gangs, and being perpetrators/victims of community violence and crime, however, the group is open to all youth who wish to join.

The two primary goals of the program are:

1. To establish safe, trusting, respectful relationships without judgment so that case managers may provide guidance, referral support, and life skills to youth participants and their families.
2. To focus on individual youths' strengths and to introduce participants to new experiences so they are able to learn positive ways to meet their needs instead of choosing gangs, drugs, alcohol, and violence.

Tailor Made participants meet regularly in groups to work on life skills, healthy decision-making, anger management, and job preparedness. However, the group also provides an opportunity for sharing, fun, and exploration.

In addition to group meetings, the case manager works individually with all participants providing them consistent one-on-one attention and support and assisting them to create a "case plan" which identifies the youth's needs, personal goals, and strengths. Incentives and rewards are identified and awarded if the case plan goals are achieved.

“The first time I heard him [Will] talk about Tailor Made was when he came to talk to our class about it, and he was so passionate about what he was saying it was clear that he wanted to make a difference for kids who were having problems. I decided to go once and check it out. It was so much fun I kept going back,” said Amanda, an 18-year-old junior at Leadership High. “I choose to come here not because I am bad but because I wanted to join a group I could commit to and that would help me out. Will just looked like someone I could trust, and I can. We talk about all kinds of things from gang violence to going to college. We have our first college tour next week. Will arranged it for us because we said we needed to see what colleges looked like to help inspire us. We talk a lot about violence, about the things that happen in our community that we could fix. We got bored listening only to what was wrong all the time and told Will we wanted to do something right, wanted to change things. So we added college tours and job placement to help us make things better.”

The group at Leadership High is one of four Tailor Made groups that meet weekly at local schools to talk, work, and share life stories and challenges. Each Tailor Made group operates a little differently, but each aims to equip students with the skills and tools to advocate for themselves. During group sessions, students have a chance to listen and be heard.

While Tailor Made at Leadership High is a co-ed group, the ones that operate at Denman, June Jordan High School, and San Francisco Community School are male only. Last year, Tailor Made also ran a successful girls-only group for Denman students.

For the 2007-2008 school year, Tailor Made served 143 students with case management and group support. It served a total of 298 9-to-14-

year-old participants in all of its programs: 43% Male and 57% Female.

### *What Makes It Work?*

After-school programs at the high-school level are notoriously difficult to operate. Adolescents of this age manage their own time, are ready to leave the school building the minute the last bell rings, and would rather be hanging out with friends. But Tailor Made seems to defy the mold, creating an alternative to gang membership by intentionally developing a strong sense of group cohesion and belonging, defining roles in the group, providing opportunities for leadership, and “being real with the participants.” Run by facilitators who themselves have experienced many of the challenges faced by the students, Tailor Made’s blend of counseling and case management relies heavily on building relationships with the students by staff who serve also as role models to whom they can relate.

According to the several participants, Tailor Made staff is effective because the staff “have been there” and understand many of the challenges the young people face. “While it is essential that our staff have formal skills such as group facilitation, counseling, case management, and an understanding of youth development principles, having the ‘right’ staff in place is essential to attract youth into the program,” explained MacGillis. “An adult facilitator who can speak to high-risk youth with relatable experiences, confidence in their voice, and passion will be attractive and able to earn the youth’s respect. These traits are usually not gained through trainings but are found with particular people who have a personal connection to the subject.”

“For me, teachers teach,” said Emmanuel. “But, Will [Corpuz] is a friend, a mentor, and a guide. With my teachers all I really learn is about school. With Will I learn about how to take care of my life,

how to be somebody. My parents don't really understand me; they are from Mexico and didn't grow up here. With Will, I can relate to him; he understands my problems and knows what its like to grow up here. Before TM, I had a lot of bad habits, but coming here made me want to stop. No one told me I had to, but they helped me see another way and then helped me change."

At Leadership High, most Tailor Made participants choose to be in the group, and only a handful are referred by teachers or counselors. Dean of Students, Sara Rosenfelt, who works with the Beacon to recruit students, says it is hard to get students to stay after school until you build a "culture." Although students can get community service hours for participating in the group, she is not a believer of incentives to get students to do "what's right" and feels students should join because they are interested and can benefit from the program. And doing "what's right" is the type of culture Leadership High fosters on all levels.

Although this is only the first year of the program at Leadership, Rosenfelt says she has already seen the positive influence Tailor Made has had on its participants. "The staff of Tailor Made has a real passion to help youth succeed. All the facilitators are speaking from experience when talking to the kids and it is that life experience and conviction that helps all the kids and allows them to see models of success who they can believe and trust."

The program is designed to help every student work through their own issues at their own pace. "The program is not about concrete results," says Rosenfelt, "it's about building relationships and trust so students can open up, ask for help, and deal with issues. If you did a study, the results would be hard to quantify as each kid is different, has different challenges, and needs a different set of supports to help them succeed. I can't measure

it in numbers, but I know I have seen a difference in the attitudes and behaviors of our Tailor Made students."

Designed to provide youth with a range of supports to cope with the difficult issues they face growing up in an urban environment, as well as empower them to make healthy and meaningful life choices, Tailor Made spends many sessions discussing accountability, the root causes of community challenges and the impact of their actions on others. Several times a year, Tailor Made youth participate in "Silence the Violence" marches and events providing an opportunity for youth to be seen in a positive light in the community. Tailor Made also helps youth get back into school if truant, connect with academic support for subjects they are struggling with, and emphasizes the opportunities that come with an education.

To work effectively, Tailor Made needs to be part of a purposeful system of services. While the ingredients for success are rooted in relationships and seem quite simple—the right staff, resources, engaging activities, and partnerships for referrals—the pre-requisites to operate and sustain the Tailor Made concept are firmly rooted in the organizational capacity of the lead agency, the well established structure and relationships of the Beacon, and a strong partnership with the host schools.

Tailor Made is supported by a strong lead agency with an understanding of both the mental health field and the nuances of piecing together funding and sufficient staffing for school-based programming. By maximizing existing resources, pursuing creative funding, and connecting to a range of human service providers, Tailor Made provides multiple opportunities' for its participants to learn, lead, and live.

For Emmanuel, the impact Tailor Made has had on his life is clear, “Through Tailor Made I learned I can get high for two hours, but after two hours and even two years my problems will still be there. Will referred me to a counselor at Balboa Teen Clinic who has helped me identify my triggers and how to recognize and change the choices I make. He didn’t force me to go to the counselor, but helped me understand the consequences of the choices I was making. Tailor Made helped me stop using drugs. This experience has made me more independent, helped me find another part of myself and taught me to be more of a man. I even notice a difference in my behavior and attitudes. Now I am a part of TM and look forward to Wednesdays. [Tailor Made] feels like a community—we all work together. If I ever have a problem, I can trust everyone in the room not to say anything. Will even helped me get a job.”

# 3

Beacons Movement and  
Youth Programming



## *The Beacons Movement and Youth Programming*

Beacons forge partnerships across public, non-profit, and private institutions to fortify neighborhoods. They create pathways for participation across age groups and a continuum of programming that promotes healthy development and strong families. They provide jobs to young people and adults, which contribute to local economic development. They help to make neighborhoods safe and connect residents to each other and to local resources. At a time when social services are increasingly located outside of the communities that need them, they serve as a hub for an array of social and educational supports.

Beacons were among the first citywide after-school initiatives. The massive expansion of after-school programs that began in 1992 was fueled in part by the early example of the Beacon movement. But while after-school programs use a service-delivery approach, Beacons use a comprehensive community development model with a focus on youth development. Activities in every area, from after-school to adult education, are embedded in the process of building community that:

- Supports and engages local youth.
- Feels a sense of ownership, with a desire to convert a school building into a community center.
- Recognizes and supports community resources, builds the capacity of youth and other community members to identify needs, address issues, and capitalize on different strengths.

The Beacons, while diverse and responsive to neighborhood interests and strengths, are shaped by a core set of youth development principles that

research has shown help people to achieve stronger outcomes: caring relationships, high expectations, opportunities to contribute, engaging activities, and continuity in relationships.

As a result of their experience in developing Beacons, many organizations that started as “mom and pop” associations in response to neighborhood needs now offer extensive family and youth-supporting services including foster care, drop out prevention, summer youth employment, and out-of-school time activities. In New York City and San Francisco, these organizations advance school reform efforts. Applying youth development principles and a commitment to the success of all students, they have helped to reshape high schools, making them more personalized, and sharply increasing graduation rates among youth who previously would have dropped out.

The Beacons provide multiple opportunities for young people to build the 21st-century skills that are essential to their development and success as workers, citizens, and environmental stewards. They help young people respond to the changing demands of the workplace and the increased need for post-secondary education. In Beacons, young people:

- Work in teams, solve problems, and master critical skills.
- Take on powerful roles that make a difference to their peers and their communities
- Get involved in planning projects, assessing their communities, analyzing results, and taking action to address local problems.
- Master core literacy skills in reading, writing, media, and technology.
- Teach, mentor, and serve as role models for younger children.
- Collaborate with adults around important issues.



All these opportunities build the skills and knowledge the next generation needs to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to sustain the well-being of the nation and earth.

Each Beacon city also includes an intermediary organization that provides training and support to the Beacon and works with policy makers to sustain the vision. For example, in New York City, the Youth Development Initiative, is one such intermediary that offers training and coaching to sites, develops programs, and works with the city and advocacy groups to support best practices. In San Francisco, the San Francisco Beacon Initiative, convenes a citywide group of leaders in philanthropy and public agencies to build support for the Beacons, raise funds, and provide training and related supports to sites.

### *Evidence of Success & Continuing Need*

Evaluations in New York and San Francisco find that Beacons attract participants of all ages, many of whom attend on a regular basis. Participation by substantial numbers of adolescents, traditionally the hardest to recruit and retain in out-of-school programs, is the result of adherence to youth development principles. Among adolescents, the Beacons increase young people's self-efficacy and the level of effort they put into school, which are both critical factors in school success and persistence (Walker & Arbureton, 2004). They provide extensive homework help, enrichment activities that build skills and knowledge, and connections with schools and families on academic issues (Warren, 1999, pp 3-6). They help youth avoid negative behaviors such as drug use and fighting, and foster leadership and provide opportunities for volunteering and contributing to community (Ibid, p. 5). In neighborhoods like Red Hook in Brooklyn, where residents were once afraid to leave their apartments at night, the Beacon is not only a haven, but has, through its programs and networks, made the whole commu-

nity safer (see *Practices to Keep: Preventing Placement in Foster Care: Strengthening Family and Community Ties*. Youth Development Institute, 2009).

The need for Beacons and other programs that build on similar principles is more urgent today than ever. The economic crisis that began in 2008 has affected every sector of society, but will inevitably hit poor communities where Beacons are located the hardest. Too often, services are removed from the very neighborhoods where they are needed most. The Beacons place services in the center of poor communities. The gains that Beacons helped create must be protected, as need increases for comprehensive and coordinated services, high quality education, work preparation, and community safety. Beacons have earned the trust and respect of the local residents, and provide a tested infrastructure for attaching additional or consolidating programs.

*Practices to Keep* illustrates how Beacons provide young people with pathways to increasingly responsible roles, involve youth and adults in improving their communities, and create environments of support to keep families together. They all depend on partnerships and all recognize that their impact is inextricably tied to collective action. All told, these efforts add up to potent forces for local economic development and building cohesive communities.