

Youth Making a Difference in our Community

A Project 20/20 Leadership Meeting

May 26, 2010

Burnham Brook, 7:30 a.m.



Welcome and Opening Comments

Talia Champlin opened the meeting with introductions and an overview of the meeting agenda. The topic for the meeting was youth engagement and title was “Youth Making a Difference in our Community”. Talia reminded attendees that Project 20/20 facilitates these important conversations among leaders and community members. The meeting presenters are the individuals doing the work and need our support. Talia then introduced Jim Pearl, Executive Director of HandsOn Battle Creek.

Jim Pearl, Abby Buckley and Adam O’Neill – HandsOn Battle Creek

Jim Pearl gave an overview of youth engagement programming in Battle Creek. There has been a paradigm shift in youth engagement. We can no longer create programs for youth but we create the programs with youth. We have evolved into listening to youth, giving them the opportunity to provide input and then implementing the program with their assistance. Youth engagement requires complete commitment. Youth want and deserve to be involved from the conception of an idea to the implementation of the program. This opportunity helps them to develop the skills, tools and passion to succeed. Although we have several youth programs, there is still much work to be done to engage youth in our community. We must work together and roll up our sleeves to make a positive difference in our youths’ lives.

Abby Buckley, Youth Program Coordinator at HandsOn Battle Creek, discussed the importance of fostering successful programs for youth. These programs empower youth to make a difference in the community. It helps to develop their individual strengths and abilities necessary to shape their future. Youth want to be involved in the decisions that affect them. They want their voices to be recognized and heard. There are several programs that effectively engage youth in the community. One of them is the Youth Public Engagement Internship Program (a program of HandsOn Battle Creek) which offers youth the opportunity to work with a non-profit organization or for profit businesses to get real world experience and develop essential skills for their future careers. The program also benefits the non-profit and business by using youth as a valuable resource and learning about youth engagement. Last year, HandsOn Battle Creek received 115 youth applicants for this program. Another program, the Youth Alliance Committee (YAC) of the Battle Creek Community Foundation, is a program run by area high school youth. They serve as a grant review committee, participate in community service projects and award youth scholarships. The goal of this program is to involve high schools students in improving the quality of life in the community. Another program, Equal Sides Magazine (a program of Community Inclusive Recreation), is a youth magazine published by teens which promotes artistic and entrepreneurial expression in the community.

Adam O’Neill, a Youth Public Engagement Intern at HandsOn Battle Creek, spoke about youth engagement from a youth perspective. There are three steps to positive and meaningful youth engagement. The first is to identify those youth that want to be more engaged. Eventually,

students will want more than high school will or can offer. The adults in the community should watch for the opportunity to reach out and get the youth involved. Secondly, youth must be engaged meaningfully. Give them the responsibilities you would normally give adults. It may be risky because mistakes are bound to happen. However, everyone makes mistakes, even adults. By allowing youth to make mistakes, you will give them the opportunity to grow. Youth will exceed your expectations. Lastly, keep pushing youth forward. Continue giving more responsibility and help them reach the goals they set throughout their work experience.

It is important to refrain from “adultism”, which is a predisposition to engage in adult behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions to discriminate against youth. Adults should mentor and support youth and promote maturity through the sharing of experiences and mistakes. When we listen, engage and propel youth forward, we will see the change we want to see in Battle Creek. The sustainability of the community rests in the hands of our youth.

Group Discussion and Input

Following the presentation, members were asked to consider the following question: **How can we develop and prepare the next generation of community leaders?**

An individual from each table shared the top 2 - 4 key points with the group. Please note the record of all additional notes taken is at the end of this document.

Top Key Points Reported by Each Group

- Encourage more businesses to participate
 - Get to know each specific businesses needs
- HandsOn to make presentations to many community groups
 - Show benefits of the “risk” they would take on
- Better connect all youth activities/programs in the area
- Make sure meaningful tasks are given to youth with follow through (when they do provide input – we follow through with it)
- Youth need the opportunity for mistakes and successes – let youth stretch through activities
- Humbling to contribute – youth can find meaning in any and all service
- Engage all youth – don’t turn them down
- Paradigm shift to making decisions with youth and making them partners
- Community should be approaching HandsOn to help engage youth not vice versa
- Build system of valuing youth people – from birth through adulthood
- Involve parents to enable kids to become engaged
- Create an ongoing community celebration of youth (appreciation = value)
- Have to commit to working with students that struggled (they have unique challenges) – not just honor students
- Youth also have to learn the “rules of society”

After the group report out, members were then asked to make a personal commitment. Within, discussion groups each member was asked to share their answer to the following question: “What can you or your organization do to better engage youth in our community?”

Closing Comments

Members were encouraged to attend the next Project 20/20 event on June 15th from 4:30 – 6 p.m. at the Burnham Brook Community Center (200 W. Michigan Avenue in Battle Creek). The title for the community forum will be “Positive Opportunities for Youth Engagement”. Members were also reminded of the next Leadership Meeting on September 22nd from 7:30 – 9 a.m. in the Valentine Room at the Burnham Brook Community Center. The topic for that meeting will be economic development.

Amanda Lankerd reminded members to take the table hand-outs with them. One handout was an article on youth engagement written by Adam O’Neill. It was published in the Battle Creek Enquirer a few months ago. The other handout was a Youth Public Engagement Site Application for the Youth Public Engagement Internship Program. Organizations and businesses were encouraged to fill out the application. If approved, applicants will be able to work with one high school intern from September – December 2010 for at least 10 hours per week. Applications are due June 11, 2010.

Members were asked to complete a survey, make a donation, become a fan of Project 20/20 on Facebook or follow our tweets, visit the Project 20/20 website at www.BCProject2020.com and invite others to join us.

Compilation of Additional Ideas Taken from Table Top Note Pads

- Roles are clear for organizations and youth
- New learning opportunities – take challenges
- Level of performance – expected and desired
- Engage youth in desired activities
- Experience counts
- Youth need to share experience with other youth
- Youth involvement is valued
- Need opportunities earlier
- Continuum showing desire to have youth engaged
- Cross-community pipeline, not fragmented
- Encourage parent service in community
- Letter to parents about service
- Change tone of negativity about youth and promote positivity
- Adult – allies
- Promote wide ranged civic involvement
- 4-H is outside school but comprehensive through age
- Opportunity freshman year (early)
- Better filtering of info within high schools to various adults
- Role of parents in encouraging?
- Teacher role?
- Remove barriers – community must be open to youth role and finding ways they fit
- Find out what youth need and give it to them
- Link to youth through those already engaged
- Connect youth to resources that exist in community
- Hold up examples of engaged youth for community to see