Sharing Data to Prevent Violence in Louisville

School failure and illiteracy are two risk factors that increase the likelihood of violence in a neighborhood. As part of its effort to prevent violence, Louisville's Office of Youth Development tracks students' participation in after-school programs, and links it to academic achievement and reduced truancy.

Representatives from UNITY and three cities in the UNITY City Network presented at the Sixth Annual Youth Violence Prevention Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, in March 2011. The following narrative is excerpted from Darrell Aniton's remarks.

It is incumbent upon each of us to help the school system educate our kids, and research shows that young people who participate in after-school programs three or more days a week perform better academically. Through data sharing, community-based organizations have the information they need to involve more young people in out-of-school time programs.

Too often in our community and communities across the country, organizations operate in silos. The Louisville Metro Government, Jefferson County Public Schools and Metro United Way came together to ensure we had a coordinated out-of-school-time system, YouthPrint. We mapped all the programs and services for young people in our community to identify and address service gaps, and we use membership tracking software so youth programs make the most of out-of-school time and better serve the kids.

Darrell Aniton is the Louisville Metro policy, advocacy and outreach manager for community services and revitalization. He oversees advocacy offices and programs, as well as the Office of Youth Development, Office for Women, and nutrition programs in the Office of Aging and Disabled Citizens. Darrell served as the director of the Louisville Metro Office of Youth Development for more than 10 years, and he has more than 30 years of experience working with and for young people. Darrell started his career as a summer worker at the Boys and Girls Club, where he later became the director. He has worked in the private, public and non-profit sectors to create new initiatives, programs and services for young people. The Office of Youth Development is the premier youth organization in Louisville that builds community collaborations and partnerships. Darrell serves on numerous boards and advisory groups throughout the city. He is passionate about youth work and an advocate for young people and those who work with youth.

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A System for Collecting Data

Participating organizations issue cards to all students, and the cards can be used at the library and for a discount when riding public transportation. Young people scan their cards when they enter or exit a facility, so organizations can see how many students participate in programs and how much time they spend there, which students live in a certain zip code, and can analyze data for all the girls or all the boys.

The membership tracking software we use is TraxSolutions, developed by nFocus. TraxSolutions in itself is just a database, and we wanted to take it farther. We wanted organizations to be able to access even more data than what they collect themselves and to connect the schools with after-school and out-of-school programs. The Jefferson County Public Schools system shares data on its 99,000 students with participating community and faith-based organizations, and these groups upload the information they gather using TraxSolutions so schools can access it. Around 60 organizations currently use this system, and we recently received funding to expand to 20 more sites.

This way, community-based organizations can review and analyze school data as one way to determine whether their program improved students' attendance and academic achievement, as measured by grades and test scores. Even if you get 100 percent of students to bring in their report cards, it would take hours and hours to put the data in a useful format. TraxSolutions makes this process easy and allows organizations to make decisions that improve programs. You have the information you need to adapt your program to make it more effective, or to develop and implement a new program that works.

TraxSolutions allows us to generate detailed reports on how participation in after-school programs correlates with improved school attendance and higher scores on the standardized test all students in Kentucky take every quarter. We want all our kids to be proficient in every subject, and some community organizations work with students who are reading below grade level, for example. As time passed, we saw the number of novice readers drop by 75 percent, and more young people became proficient. That's the kind of report that a community-based organization can generate to measure the impact of its services and programs, and track outcomes.

FIVE STEPS TO SHARING DATA IN LOUISVILLE

1. Obtain buy-in from stakeholders. Parents sign an agreement allowing the community group to gather information about their children.

2. Partner with the school system. Louisville organizations sign confidentiality and other formal agreements with Jefferson County Public Schools.

3. Ensure systems compatability. Louisville developed a bridging system called CASCADE for community organizations to access the Jefferson County Public Schools data. This technology connects the after-school programs' TraxSolutions program and the public schools database.

4. Purchase data collection software. The city government purchases TraxSolutions for participating agencies, and the community groups pay the $600 annual licensing fee.

5. Use the system. The Louisville Office of Youth Development provides training and technical assistance to community groups learning to use the system. The community organizations can now access school records but cannot see each other's data.

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Advantages of a Coordinated System

Improved Programs

Data is not always going to give you good news, but bad news exists so you can begin addressing the problems and improve programs. For example, when the Boys and Girls Clubs did a query on all the ninth graders who participated in their program, they found that ninth graders weren't attending school consistently. Ninth grade is that transition period between middle and high school, and often it is when young people decide to quit school. Our drop-out rate is 27 percent, not good.

In response to the data, the Boys and Girls Clubs developed and implemented a new truancy prevention program that increased the attendance of ninth-grade students. TraxSolutions tells us which of the school system's 99,000 kids are participating in out-of-school-time programs, so that we could do targeted outreach and bring in the disconnected young people in our community.

We also held a Drop-Out Prevention Summit with 460 individuals and young people from throughout the community. We produced recommendations, such as creating a high-level Drop-Out Prevention Coordinator position within the school system. We are also developing an early warning system to identify potential drop-outs and intervene to ensure that these young people stay in school. We started the 55,000 Degrees Initiative, which ensures that 40,000 more individuals from our community receive bachelor's degrees and 15,000 earn associate's degrees. The business community supports this, along with the school system and community and faith-based organizations. We must ensure that our graduation rate continues to climb so 55,000 more residents receive degrees.

Had it not been for a program like TraxSolutions, we wouldn't have had any idea that the ninth graders who participated in the Boys and Girls Clubs were missing a lot of school. This is just one example of how this data collection system helps.

Opportunities for Increased Funding

We require agencies to report TraxSolutions data to city government, and many of these agencies have to report to other funders. TraxSolutions helps them to measure outcomes and make the case for continued funding.

If you ask most youth organizations if they're any good, most of them think they're the best thing since sliced bread. But if you ask them, "How do you know you're good?" most of them will say, "Well, this long-time participant

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LOUISVILLE METRO OFFICE
OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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in my program has gotten a scholarship to go to Harvard, Yale, Princeton, or some college." When you have a system such as TraxSolutions, you can share that same story about this young man, and you can also say, "Independent data from the Jefferson County Public School System says 85 percent of the students who participate in my program saw increased academic achievement, improved attendance and reduced suspensions." Having data to back up the story can have a lot of impact on funding decisions. If you were a funder, who would you give the money to—an organization with just an anecdote or story, or an organization that has the data to back it up?

Challenges and Solutions

Computer Literacy
Many of these community-based organizations were not completely computer-literate and did not know how to operate the system. We provided training and technical assistance for agencies to learn how to use the system. The Jefferson County Public School's Information Technology Department provided in-person trainings on the school database, with additional support from the company that produces TraxSolutions.

Over time, some individuals became experts on TraxSolutions, and we had networks of community-based organizations that worked together to learn the system. Once they did that, everyone was able to access the school data and upload their own.

Barriers to Participation
Local government's role in implementing TraxSolutions was to recruit youth service agencies to participate and adopt and use the software. Many organizations were very apprehensive at first, talking about Big Brother looking at the information and knowing what you're doing with the kids. They felt, "Well, you might discontinue our funding because we're not meeting the outcomes you want."

I was open and honest with them—"We are trying to pull together the kind of data system we will need to make those kinds of decisions in the future, but for now, if you're not making a difference for the kids that you serve, all we will do is have a conversation with you and suggest ways you can improve your program. Later on, yes, we will mandate that any organization funded by the Office of Youth Development implement TraxSolutions so we can utilize that data as it relates to funding."

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We also offered to pay the initial $2,000 for the TraxSolutions software, with the agencies paying only the $600 licensing fee. Most agencies agreed to participate, since the Office of Youth Development has a great relationship with the community-based organizations in our city. We have formed collaborations and partnerships with so many agencies that work with young people in the community that they have a lot of respect and trust in the Office of Youth Development.

Toward a Community Vision

The community's vision for young people in our city is that Louisville youth:

- Have hope and show strength of character to achieve their goals, follow their dreams, respect others, and make better their community and the world

- Acquire the skills and education to be self-reliant, healthy, engaged and to thrive economically

- Live in a caring community where everyone values, supports, invests in and fights for their success.

This vision is the umbrella for everything we do for young people in our community. Our youth violence prevention initiative falls under this vision, and so does the coordinated out-of-school-time system we're developing. We're working with parents and young people to determine what they want and need, so we can support agencies as they serve our community.

LEARN MORE

UNITY RoadMap
Data & Evaluation is one of the essential elements for preventing violence. Read pages 3-8 of the UNITY RoadMap's Strategy chapter (pdf) for key characteristics and city examples.

Guidebook to Strategy Evaluation
Written for cities working to prevent violence, this step-by-step guide describes how to develop and implement an evaluation plan. Among other criteria, it examines how well different sectors coordinate their efforts to ensure community safety and meet other shared objectives.

Webinar Series on Data & Evaluation
Slides, handouts and recordings available for these UNITY webinars:

- Community Safety Scorecard
- Measuring Success: Strategies for Program Evaluation
- What Outcomes to Use? Effective Indicator Selection

Understanding Evidence
This online tool created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention introduces three types of evidence—research, experiential and contextual—so practitioners can make sound decisions when preventing violence.

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