

Kids' Council Year-End Report 2014-15

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Nancy Tauber, Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

The Kids' Council, officially known as the Coordinating Council for Children, Youth and Families was created in 1991. It is chaired by the Mayor, and its members include residents, elected officials, department heads within the City, community and non-profit leaders, business, early childhood, philanthropic, university, state agency and youth representatives. The Council is dedicated to developing policy and program recommendations aimed at improving the quality of life for children, youth and families in the city of Cambridge.

Criteria for Choosing an Area of Focus

The Kids' Council developed and agreed upon criteria for choosing an area of focus. We used this list of criteria to figure out what would be the best way for the Council to further our work around family engagement.

1. Addresses articulated community needs.
2. Builds on existing and already planned initiatives, rather than being duplicative.
3. Utilizes the strengths and resources of the members and Executive Director of the Kids' Council and offers clear ways for them to contribute.
4. Enhances the capacity of the Kids' Council, providers, agencies and networks to continually learn from families and incorporate the voices, the needs and strengths of families with an emphasis on families who historically don't have a voice.
5. Aligns with the function and purpose of the Kids' Council as stated in the ordinance which established it.
6. Increases the ability of all families (with emphasis on families with fewer opportunities for access and participation) to access resources and help providers reach families
7. Includes benchmarks to track progress toward desired outcomes and where possible use existing data and information.
8. Recognizes the resources and relationships needed at the onset.
9. Takes something on where we can show progress within a year.
10. Creates opportunities for partnership.
11. Initiative will be visible to the people we are trying to reach.

Area of Focus 2014-15

Develop recommendations to make it easier for families to access information, services and resources in Cambridge.

Begin by developing a centralized on-line resource portal so that families, youth and those who work with them can more easily access services, supports and information and take advantage of what the city has to offer.

CAMBRIDGE INFORMATION HUB NETWORK PROPOSAL

Background

Cambridge has a wealth of resources, including many resources designed to support and enrich the lives of families. One of the greatest barriers to access, according to interviews and surveys, is that the systems are so complex that families are often unaware of resources that would be available to them. This dizzying array of options and networks can be overwhelming, and we need to find effective and sustainable solutions.

Since the fall of 2013, the following efforts have been made to gather feedback from Cambridge stakeholders representing families and city, school, and community partners who work with them.

- Interviewed 91 parents and 122 providers to find out what type of information families are looking for, where they go to find it, challenges and suggestions.
- Partnered with volunteers from Code for Boston to help develop and design a centralized online resource.
- Conducted a one-day Design Sprint with 14 stakeholders to start the process of co-producing a new and improved easy-to-use, multi-lingual, single point portal.
- Disseminated a survey taken by over 1,250 people.
- Led 3 sessions with a total of 35 people who work with Cambridge families to brainstorm ideas for the Information Hub Network and identify pros, cons and feasibility for each idea.
- Analyzed all the information gathered to determine what actions need to be taken to create an Information Hub Network so that families, youth, and those who support them can easily find the activities, services and resources they are looking for in Cambridge.

Desired Outcomes

- Families have a clear entry point for services, supports and information.
- Families are aware of and can easily access all the resources available.
- Families and those working with them have people to talk to and a place to go.
- Translation and cultural barriers are reduced.
- Build off of what we already have so that we can avoid duplication and service families more effectively and efficiently.

Cambridge Information Hub Network Proposal

- **Find It Cambridge** The Kids' Council is working with Code for Boston and Terravoz to develop and design Find It Cambridge – www.finditcambridge.org. Families, youth and those who work with them will have the technology to find what they are looking for, when they are looking for it, and it will be centralized, up-to-date, accurate, easy to use and eye-catching.

- **Connectors** Official information/referral people who will provide updated, accurate information and be available for people to call, visit or email.
- **Hotline** One main phone number people can call to talk to a person about information and referral and get connected to the appropriate person/department. Phone # will be posted on www.finditcambridge.org.
- **“Information Hub” Outposts** Places that already exist where people can go to get information and access to services and resources in Cambridge.
- **Mobile “Information Hub”** An energy efficient truck/van or bicycle that travels around the City of Cambridge with staff equipped with tablets with access to www.finditcambridge.org.

In order for the Cambridge Info Hub Network to be successful, consider the following:

- Scope of what information will be provided
- Cost and Compensation
- Translation
- Customer Service
- Training
- Evaluation
- Marketing

Criteria to evaluate potential solutions:

- Will it help accomplish our desired outcomes?
- Is it feasible to create, support and sustain?
- Is it affordable?
- Is it better than what we have now and/or builds upon what already exists?
- Will there be staff responsible for planning, coordinating, and supervising the Information Hub Network

FIND IT CAMBRIDGE WEBSITE (www.finditcambridge.org)

The Find It Cambridge website is currently being developed, and the official launch is scheduled for early 2016. The goal of the website is to make it easier for parents and other caring adults to find the amazing array of activities, services, and resources that are available for children, youth and families in Cambridge.

Background

The Kids' Council has been developing recommendations to make it easier for families and providers to access the many resources available in Cambridge. After analyzing the data, it became clear that families and those working with them would like a new and improved technology to find what they are looking for when they are looking for it. After soliciting feedback from many in the community, we decided to name the website Find It Cambridge.

Partnership with Code for Boston

Code for Boston volunteer, Ethan Bagley facilitated a one-day workshop in July, 2014 with 14 stakeholders to start the process of co-producing a new and improved website. The stakeholders were Cambridge residents and representatives from the city, schools, and community based organizations. They were asked to look at the current landscape and attitudes toward services within Cambridge, and then come up with the “perfect” solution: an easy-to-use, single point portal which can be translated into many languages. The remainder of the day was spent figuring out how to make that aspirational solution a reality.

The next stage was to work with Cambridge stakeholders to gather feedback from residents and service providers in order to understand their needs and take the “build with, not for” approach. We developed a survey based on the activities and discussions that took place during the workshop, and we were extremely pleased that over 1,250 people took it. The valuable insights we have gleaned from the survey have informed us of our technical needs, possible pitfalls, and language and accessibility issues.

In December, Code for Boston volunteers, Leo Burd, Maria Grinko, and Megan Ouellette, joined the team. They analyzed the data, identified key insights and learnings, and then developed a proposal to outline the technical and functional specifications necessary to start creating the website.

Design and Development of Find It Cambridge Begins

Thanks to funding from the Department of Human Service Programs and Information Technology Department, we hired Terravoz, a strategy, research and software development company to design and develop Find It Cambridge. The team includes; Leo Burd, project manager, Ben Melancon, developer, and Todd Linkner, designer. They have begun designing the wireframe and developing the process for content providers to input and update their information on Find It. Our goal is to have a soft launch of the website in October.

Harvard School of Public Health

Kerri Rice and Yvette Efevbera, students from Justeen Hyde's Harvard School of Public Health class, conducted a study using a community-based participatory action research framework to identify lessons learned from other cities that have created and implemented similar online resource portals.

- *HelpSteps*, Boston MA
- *Somerville Early Childhood Hub*, Somerville MA
- *SMC-Connect*, San Mateo CA

They conducted interviews, analyzed their findings, and then presented their research and recommendations to the Kids' Council Executive Committee, Code for Boston volunteers, and Terravoz team.

Google Community Grant

Developing a resource-rich website is not enough, we need to familiarize users with Find It. We plan to do this through face-to-face connections by which we will increase access and reduce barriers so that a diverse range of citizens are encouraged and empowered to benefit from Find It.

Fortunately, the Kids' Council received a Google Community Grant for \$22,360 to enhance the capacity of the Find It website. We will be creating a team of *Find It Finders* to reach out and educate both Cambridge providers and expected users, with special attention to the traditionally underserved, under-resourced and/or those affected by the digital divide.

We will recruit and train *Finders* to engage with potential end users and content providers of Find It Cambridge. Equipped with bicycles and mobile devices, the *Finders* will be the friendly human face of the website. They will be charged with 1) going to the different neighborhoods of Cambridge to raise awareness about Find It and 2) collecting data on the website's usability so that we can make improvements thus augmenting its impact over the long term. In addition, the *Finders* will meet with content providers whose program and activity information is posted on the website. The *Finders* will 1) encourage these providers to input and update their information 2) show them how to do it and 3) ask them how we can improve the system. This exercise will also let providers know that this is a tool they can use to advertise their services and help families find needed resources in Cambridge.

CAMBRIDGE BOOK BIKE

The Book Bike is a collaboration between the Agenda for Children Literacy Initiative, Center for Families, Cambridge Public Library, Summer Food Program, and Liz Phipps Soeiro (School Librarian at the Cambridgeport School). Their goal is to make sure all children in Cambridge have a home library with quality literature. During the summer, the book bike delivers FREE books to kids in 5 parks 4 days a week to support literacy and promote reading as something fun to do. Children also have the opportunity to participate in the Summer Food program and listen to stories and participate in many activities.

Last summer the Book Bike pilot program proved to be very successful at Hoyt Field, Greene-Rose Heritage and Gold Star Mother's Parks. This year the Kids' Council recommended the City support the continuation of the Book Bike program. The Kids' Council also purchased a second bike to serve North Cambridge at Danehy Park and Russell Field so that the program could expand to North Cambridge.

EXPAND DOOR 2 DOOR

For several years, the Police Department and Department of Human Services have been partnering with one another on a Door-to-Door campaign – actively outreaching to various neighborhoods around the city, particularly focusing on Cambridge Housing Authority properties. One of the primary objectives is to build greater trust with the families of our neighborhoods and to promote greater community participation.

This past May with the help of the Kids' Council and some of our member organizations, the Door-to-Door campaign was expanded in Newtowne Court / Washington Elms. Over forty volunteers participated in the Door-to-Door including police officers and youth workers along with members of faith based organizations and nonprofits. Many of the participating organizations had not participated in the past and all have committed to take part again next year.

The campaign for the first time added a survey asking residents what they are interested in and what they wish was more available in terms of city services. The information gathered will help us better connect and collaborate with families to build community capacity, participation and connections with the city, schools, and social services.

Over 300 doors knocked
And 30 surveys turned in

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TEAM (CET)

Since 2012, the Kids' Council has been working with the CET to seek ways to enhance the capacity of this multi-agency collaborative that reaches out to under-served Cambridge families and connects them to community events and resources, develops community leaders, and supports agencies in working with a diverse community.

FY14 Budget

Kids' Council recommended that the city support:

- Hire two additional outreach workers and increase current hours to work on special projects.
- Plan and develop a series of training modules for outreach workers across the city.
- Cambridge Public Schools contract with CET for 832 hours of outreach worker time.

FY15 Budget

Kids' Council recommended that the city support:

- Maintain a team of 11 outreach workers (with additional funds for special projects).
- Continue work with the Cambridge Public Schools.
- Pilot the training program for those who do outreach and engagement work in Cambridge.

FY16 Budget

Kids' Council recommended that the city support:

- Increase the hours of CET Outreach Worker.
- Hire a full-time CET Program Assistant.
- Continue the implementation of the *Making Connections* training program.
- Continue the partnership between the CET and Cambridge Public Schools.

CAMBRIDGE YOUTH COUNCIL (CYC)

The Cambridge Youth Council is the youth civic engagement component of the Cambridge Kids' Council. The Youth Council is comprised of a diverse group of young people ages 14 to 18 who work on projects related to the Kids' Council's goals and topics that are of interest to the young people.

CYC 2014-2015 Goal

Aligned with the Kids' Council's vision of Family Engagement, the Youth Council has been addressing the Opportunity to Learn Gap in both the middle schools and high school in Cambridge. Their goal is to find new ways to make sure youth voices in Cambridge are heard and that we use that information to better the lives of youth in Cambridge.

This past year CYC created a mentoring program to help middle school students with their transition to high school and assist them with any challenges they might face, both academically and socially. They also held 3 workshops focusing on race.

Y2Y Mentoring Program

Goal: Help middle school students with their transition to high school and assist them with any challenges they might face, both academically and socially.

Workshops:

1. Established trust within the group and facilitate connectivity within the group.
2. Walked the mentees through a process of mapping their academic and personal goals during their high school career, as well as went over the course catalogue and classes.
3. Focused on social challenges, explored issues of peer pressure, and talked about tools on how to trust oneself and remain comfortable within different social settings.
4. Explored what activities the mentees might be interested in, and shared how to get involved and get the most out of the wide range of opportunities at CRLS.
5. Engaged in role play activities to build communication skills with teachers to help the mentees constructively interact with their teachers.
6. Shared personal tips about the high school and talked about everything from where to eat lunch to which bathroom NOT to use.

What they learned:

- Mentees felt that their middle school teachers had too much influence in the high course selection process, and sometimes they felt disempowered and pushed away from exploring their full potential.
- Through our conversations we became much more in tune with issues they faced both in and out of school such as bullying, and anxiety about high school academics.
- 8th graders were very appreciative of having a chance to ask questions of and create relationships with current high school students.

Recommendations

1. 8th grade “Posse Program” – Groups of 8th graders meet on a regular basis in middle school to explore topics of importance to them and provide academic support to each other. This group could enter the high school together and be in the same homeroom.
2. Invite 8th graders to CYC community conversation workshops next year and set aside special time for specific Q&A session between 8th graders and CYC.

Race and Police Workshop

Goal: Create an understanding and break down barriers between and foster a positive relationship between youth and the police in Cambridge.

What they learned:

- Both the police and students seemed to share many of the same views about the relationship between police and youth.
- Students acknowledge that police officers make efforts to interact with students in Cambridge, but more efforts can still be made.

Recommendations:

1. Police officers should interact more in schools and the youth centers.
2. These kind of talks shouldn't just occur in the aftermath of police brutality, but interactions between officials and students should be much more common.
3. If there is a stronger relationship built between police officers and students, then when they see each other in the community it will be a much more pleasant experience for all.
4. Expand the conversations: talk to other police (transit police, security officers, etc...) because we interact with them as well.
5. Host more events (even having the police take the lead).

Race in Media Workshop

Goal: By raising awareness about how race is portrayed in the media we will validate people's personal experiences and give them the tools and skills to combat the messages in the media.

What they learned:

- The structure we had in this event was successful in creating a safe environment to talk about difficult topics.
- The upsetting stereotypical ads we showed during the event were taken very seriously despite their "funny" intentions.
- There were some white students who didn't feel comfortable with participating in the "I AM TOO" photo campaign because of the different personalities they can embody because of how expansive white culture is.

Recommendations:

1. I TOO AM CRLS campaign that goes beyond stereotypes and shows that we are all unique and human. This campaign has been successful in Harvard and many other universities across the world.

Race and Education Presentation

Goal: By raising awareness about race in education, we will jump start a series of discussions that will result in action steps.

What they learned:

- The need for more conversation about race at CRLS.
- The need to reform some of the class structures at CRLS/middle schools.
- More about the impact of tracking (CP vs. Honors).
- One visit to the high school is not enough for 8th graders.
- It's important that students know the difference between the classes.
- Empower youth more when they are making decisions about their education.
- Teachers are very influential, which can have positive and negative impact.

Recommendations:

2. Change how much impact 8th grade teachers have over the classes that 8th grades take in high school.
3. Students should be more educated about the high school and the types of classes that are available.
4. 8th graders create a support group for 8th graders so they can travel through the high school together. (Posse)
5. Establish a group of high school students who visit the middle schools and provide insights about the high school experience.
6. Change the name of CP (College Prep).

Massachusetts Women’s Conference: For the second year, CYC was also able to secure a scholarship so that some CYC members could attend the Massachusetts Women’s Conference and make connections with other youth groups across the state.

National League of Cities Conference: In March, members of the Cambridge Youth Council represented the City of Cambridge at the National League of Cities Conference in Washington D.C. They demonstrated their strong leadership skills by helping to facilitate a networking event with the other youth delegates and city officials from across the nation. The highlight of their trip was getting on line at 6:45am to see President Obama speak at the conference. After waiting for hours, not only did they get great seats, but many had the opportunity to shake the President’s hand.

CYC 2015-16:

- Have more workshops continuing the conversation of race and education.
- Extending the invitation to teachers.

2014-15 KIDS’COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

Mayor David Maher – Co-Chair
Neal Michaels – Co-Chair
Tina Alu
Griffin Andres
Charlotte Avant
Betty Bardige
Sally Benbasset
Andrea Collymore
Jessica Daniels
Louis DePasquale
Susan Flannery
Mary Gashaw
Michelle Godfrey

Robert Haas
George Halfkenny
Kathleen Kelly
Barbara Kibler
Susan Lapierre
John Lindamood
Alanna Mallon
Marc McGovern
Linda Mindaye
Ellen Semonoff
Patrick Wardell
Heather Weiss
Jeffrey Young