



Opportunity Youth Forum Progress Report

Due Date: October 19, 2018

1. Please reflect on the overall progress you've made during the reporting period. How does the progress you've made to-date advance the larger goals you hope to achieve?

Despite not having submitted a formal grant proposal, the Flint & Genesee Opportunity Youth Coalition has been able to make significant progress, especially given that before our efforts began there was local interest in Opportunity Youth, but little actual work underway. Support from Aspen and observations made during our Aspen site visit have resulted in the Opportunity Youth Coalition adapting to ensure the group was focused on work that resonated with them. This last year has been one of transitions. The Coalition meetings have come to be focused on resource sharing and are communities of practice.

Coalition members are engaged in disseminating information about Opportunity Youth and have taken data into account moving forward with refining and developing programs and initiatives for Opportunity Youth. Additionally, through the Coalition, stakeholders have participated in increased partnership and collaboration. When surveyed, 85% of participants found the Coalition valuable or very valuable, with 15% answering that they felt the group was reasonably valuable.

Steps the Coalition has taken to ensure progress toward moving the needle for Flint and Genesee County Opportunity Youth include:

1. Hiring the University of Michigan-Flint to provide research assistance and reporting on the demographic trends of Genesee County's Opportunity Youth and perform a fiscal scan of federal funds acquired by local service providers. The report created as a result of this work painted the initial picture for the community and raised crucial awareness and understanding of the scope of the problem.
2. Creating strong and increased-scope relationships between service-providers, facilitated and encouraged through Peer Learning Lunches and Community of Practice meetings.
3. Collecting data and sharing pertinent information. There is now consistent and ongoing communication between stakeholders including newsletters, meetings, the website and portal, and intentional outreach. All of this brings necessary attention to the issues and challenges of the population and greatly improves referral success.

The Coalition's work over the past year has vastly improved alignment between existing programs and service providers. Though we do not have formal "four-year implementation goals," we can assert that the Collaborative is mostly on-track, and making regular positive progress towards the goals we have set to support existing programs, events, and activities that help connect Opportunity Youth to the services they need, with a focus on education and employment and Enhancing a Re-Engagement Center for Flint & Genesee County Opportunity Youth.

2. Please concisely describe the progress and/or milestones you've accomplished on each part of the OYF 5-part framework (Collaborating for Impact, Building Effective Pathways, Using Data to Guide Decisions and Assess Impact, Leveraging Funding for Innovation, and Developing Supportive Policies).

Collaborating for Impact:

We have successfully been able to maintain most existing new partners from key sectors, but reaching the highest-level, most influential leaders and decision-makers in this work can be a challenge. Instead, stakeholders tend to send mid-level representatives to Coalition meetings, gatherings, Communities of Practice, and Peer Learning Lunches. On the one hand, it is very helpful to have the perspective of individuals leading the day-to-day work of re-engaging Opportunity Youth. That said, for sustainable and impactful change, we continue to work on leveraging higher level leaders. We welcome any Technical Assistance OYIF/JFF can provide with this matter.

There are a small group of non-profit agencies and organizations in Genesee County with a vested interest in supporting employment for youth. These employers host teens, ages 14-18 (overlapping the younger age range for Opportunity Youth) during summer months to expand their organizational capacity and serve more clients. The Coalition hopes to engage employers like these, who have seen the first-hand benefits of mentoring and supporting disadvantaged youth (many of the teens who participate in the Summer Youth Initiative reside in the city of Flint and are facing various adversities) in outreach and engagement of additional employers. Additionally, the Coalition is well-positioned to further engage employers through the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce.

Individually, Coalition members report having dedicated new funding to Opportunity Youth resources and services, reallocated existing funding to support Opportunity Youth programming, and collaboratively leveraged funding streams to create or increase pathways for Opportunity Youth.

Building Effective Pathways:

Coalition partners are serving the following populations: Court-Involved Youth, Foster Youth, English Language Learner Youth, Cognitively Impaired Youth, Previously Incarcerated Youth, Youth that may be making high-risk choices (especially around substance use); and Teens ages 16-24 with a disability.

During 2017, many partners strengthened their foundational programs with additional staff, counseling, and resources to support Opportunity Youth. Some examples follow.

Success Virtual Learning Center is engaging in additional outreach in the community to bring awareness to services available for youth not enrolled in school or working. They have counseling available for those who enroll in the program and are actively seeking additional partners in the community to increase access to dual enrollment opportunities, career readiness programming, trade schools and universities. They also facilitate speakers from various career fields.

The Genesee County Prevention Coalition has developed new strategic partnerships with other organizations that benefit Opportunity Youth. While the Genesee County Prevention Coalition may not be directly able to help Opportunity Youth enter the workforce, they are a substance misuse prevention organization that has prevention and early intervention programming through Remedy Exchange, Inc. that can help dissuade Opportunity Youth from engaging in substance use that can prevent them from getting hired into desired positions.

The Disability Network has devoted in-kind resources including staff and space to serving Opportunity Youth. Through Project Uncommon, a summer youth program for students with disabilities, participants attend six

days of programming where they work for an organization to complete projects, engage in mock interviewing, complete HR paperwork and submit direct deposit slips while learning about money management. The Network partners with the Crim Foundation, Communities First, and Community House and Garden for this program.

Using Data to Guide Decisions and Assess Impact:

The following strategies have been attempted and utilized to gain a deeper understanding of the >10,000 Opportunity Youth in Flint and Genesee County:

- Focus-groups with opportunity youth
- Engagement of those programs and systems currently providing services to “former” Opportunity Youth
- Data collected by the University of Michigan

Efforts continue to ensure that infrastructure and programming being developed and enhanced for Opportunity Youth are responsive, accessible, and adaptive to the changing needs of this population.

The coalition is in strong alignment with other local networks including the Flint & Genesee Literacy Network, as literacy is a large contributing factor to academic and career success, and My Brothers’ Keeper Initiative. Together with these and other partners, the Coalition is utilizing results-based accountability methods and the expertise of the Literacy Network Staff to move toward an even more sophisticated data dashboard to collectively track community outcomes for Opportunity Youth in the campaign to continuously increase awareness about OY and what can be done by local partners to re-engage, educate and employ individuals to support their success.

Leveraging Funding for Innovation:

The Chamber and programs facilitated by the Chamber, including work around Opportunity Youth are primarily grant funded. The Opportunity Youth Coalition has applied for two additional grants to support Coalition work, support staffing and cover other expenses for 2018. One application was denied and the other is still pending with limited likelihood of being funded.

The core Opportunity Youth Coalition team is striving to identify ways to accomplish current goals by further engaging other community leaders and organizations to take more active roles and provide additional in-kind support to move the group forward.

The receipt of this funding marks the first Aspen grant award for the Flint and Genesee County community. The Coalition funding was previously embedded in another, larger, grant from the C.S. Mott Foundation however, that was not the case in 2018 and will not be the case in 2019.

While the amount from the Aspen Institute has been more than generous, it currently originates with the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce’s primary funder, the C.S. Mott Foundation. C.S. Mott benevolently funds multiple efforts at the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce which can result in challenges in securing additional funding from them to support Opportunity Youth in Flint and Genesee County.

Developing Supportive Policies:

Several key policies identified that present challenges for Opportunity Youth include:

-Application and hiring forms that ask about incarceration history (as of early September 2018, individuals applying for jobs at the State of Michigan will no longer be asked on their employment applications whether

they have a criminal record. Governor Snyder has stated that he encourages private sector employers to do similarly. This could have positive policy implications for Opportunity Youth who have been incarcerated).

-Many existing support programs for this age group (16-24) focus on teens who are already engaged (attending school or working) and miss the most underserved population, those who have dropped out of high school and are unemployed.

The Flint & Genesee Opportunity Youth Coalition has prioritized, as the main systems alignment priority, creation of a sustainable local infrastructure to support successful referrals for Opportunity Youth to education, employment, and life success. The Coalition's main strategy is to inform decisions and measure progress toward goals through the use of reliable, relevant data that is measured consistently across the community.

Successful partnerships have been created with Mott Community College and the University of Michigan-Flint who are leveraging blended funds from various sources to provide youth services and have, in the past year, reallocated funds specific to serving Opportunity Youth and connecting them with educational and employment opportunities.

Various Flint & Genesee Opportunity Youth Coalition partners are prioritizing system-involved youth and have taken steps to partner with local courts and foster care support agencies to create referral pathways that can assist these youth in connecting with service providers who can counsel them through necessary next steps to successfully integrate back into school and or the workforce.

Coalition partners including the Success Virtual Learning Center, Swartz Creek Alternative High School and even Genesee County Prevention Network are providing additional support services, mindful of the unique needs of Opportunity Youth.

3. Please reflect on lessons learned, changes that you believe may result within the next year or so as a result of this work, and challenges or surprises you have encountered during the reporting period. If you have encountered challenges, please describe how you have addressed them.

One initial challenge our Coalition experienced was that the term "Collective Impact" did not resonate with stakeholders. The group of individuals coming together around Opportunity Youth was not initially receptive to the idea. At the inception of the work it was anticipated that the group would easily convene and work through the five conditions of Collective Impact. It quickly became apparent that participating stakeholders needed to begin by developing personal relationships in order to identify what each individual could immediately contribute.

Another lesson learned was that the Coalition's previous strategy, working to identify and convene youth focus groups through our partners at With Out Walls (WOW) Outreach did not garner the level of results or impact we initially hoped. The group also piloted offering cash incentives to youth enrolled at Mott Community College for recruiting additional Opportunity Youth. That strategy was also found to be less-than-effective.

Within the next year, new strategies and activities are being explored for promoting youth leadership. This includes utilizing Dennis Williams, now working at Mott Community College creating youth clubs, and partnerships with community partners including Flint RECAST, to identify and recruit additional Opportunity Youth for the Youth Advisory Council.

RECAST has connected the Coalition with the Dayton Family, a rap group from Flint, to help with Opportunity Youth identification and recruitment.

Additionally, Dennis and Meghan Slaght, a consultant working with the Opportunity Youth Coalition, are planning for monthly “Meets and Eats”, casual gatherings where Opportunity Youth can gather for fellowship. These “Meet and Eats” will help identify additional OY for the Advisory Council. Eventually, Dennis and Meghan plan to transition the group to “Speak & Eats” where they bring in speakers to present to the group.

One major challenge to securing matching funds is the lack of prioritization, among many funders, of system-building work. The Flint & Genesee Opportunity Youth Coalition is, intrinsically a system-effort which requires buy-in and participation from many community partners. Though those partners are eager to provide in-kind supports (staff time, already developed resources, etc.) many do not have the capacity to provide match funding. The most pressing resources needed locally to sustain the currently created backbone of the Opportunity Youth Coalition are finances to support staff time and administration. The group would very much like to hire a shared staff person between Mott Community College Workforce Development and the Chamber who can focus on advancing the Coalition’s work and increase success of direct navigation services at the ReMix Re-Engagement Center.

We are extremely grateful for this opportunity to devote additional time, resources and expertise to better meeting the needs of local Opportunity Youth. While the Coalition is devoted to increasing positive outcomes for all Opportunity Youth, ages 16 – 24, data shows that a higher number of 18-24 year-olds, with High School diplomas, are disengaged. This is the strategic focus for re-engagement efforts.

4. Please describe any significant unanticipated events or organizational or environmental changes that have had an impact on your work during this reporting period. Include a description of how you have responded to those changes and how your plans for the future of this work may change as a result.

The first of several significant and unanticipated events that have impacted the Coalition was the Community Foundation of Greater Flint approaching the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce (the convener of the Coalition) to facilitate Flint Promise. Flint Promise is a last-dollar scholarship program for students who reside in the city of Flint and graduate from a Flint high school or receive their GED in Flint. There are currently 11 eligible high schools, and students will be supported to attend Mott Community College, University of Michigan-Flint, Baker College, and Kettering University. Ultimately Flint Promise is intended to incentivize high school completion for Flint teens and encourage and support their college attendance.

Flint Promise is a somewhat unique Promise program, in the ways it is specifically responsive to the high-need population of Flint teens. In addition to the program’s Support Coaches, who guide the students, once enrolled in the college/university of their choice, Flint Promise is able to cover the cost of text books, and students are eligible for the program up to age 24 (very unique to Flint and came about as a result of the advocacy of FGYOC members).

Another significant environmental change that will impact Flint teens is the closing/merging of the former Northwestern High School (students now attend Southwestern Classical Academy). This has created a challenge for many teens, as the high schools were long-time rivals, and the transition has been less-than smooth. In response to this change, the Flint & Genesee Opportunity Youth Coalition is exploring innovative ways to support these teens toward successful school completion, whether at Southwestern, or at another of the approved Flint Promise-eligible high schools.

Finally, and most unfortunately, Flint is as of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the most impoverished city of its size in the America. Currently, the national average of children living in poverty is 21%. In Flint, 60%

of children are living in poverty. This means more Flint youth are growing up facing the adversities that accompany poverty including crime, trauma and toxic stress which, without intervention, can result in poor educational attainment and lack of success in school and in life. The Flint & Genesee Opportunity Youth Coalition is dedicated to systemically creating successful pathways for Flint's at-risk youth to high-quality opportunities for support, guidance, apprenticeships, higher education and/or employment.

Plans for 2018 include formalizing Results Based Accountability, in partnership with the Flint & Genesee Literacy Network and creating a dashboard (again, with FGLN) to showcase and utilize collected data. Expenses are anticipated for contracting experts to develop the dashboard and licenses.

5. If you have examples of success stories or other ways that you have captured the impact of the project, please attach or enclose them.

Dennis Williams is an impeccably dressed young black man. Tall, bespectacled, and neatly dressed in a stylish suit and tie (a defining factor, when I speak to others about Williams they always mention his excellent formal appearance), he instantly puts me at ease with a friendly smile, apologizing for running slightly late because of downtown construction traffic.

Williams, age 19, has come to talk to me about the life journey that has led him from Opportunity Youth ("at risk" for not finishing high school in his junior year), to youth community leader, college student, mentor, Mott Community College employee for youth outreach, and peer-facilitator for the Flint & Genesee Opportunity Youth Coalition's Youth Advisory.

"I discovered my passion in high school. My life was changed, and I decided I wanted to do better. I was hungry for more."

I ask Mr. Williams for his perspective on the local barriers for other Opportunity Youth in the Flint community and, after a moment's thought, he answers, "Exposure." He says young people are lacking guidance, suffering from low self-esteem, and no determination. They are suffering from a lack of attention and role models with the values and goals that will drive them to success. "Basically, they are lacking exposure to those things."

When I unpack that further, asking what reasons Dennis sees behind these deficiencies, he tells me that he thinks it is at least partially generational. According to Mr. Williams, sometimes there is a mindset, among the parents, that leads to a belief in teens that they cannot succeed.

He mentions a principal from his youth who consistently told his mom he was going to "end up dead or in prison." Not a great sentiment for a young person to hear over and over. "At risk. They always said I was at risk." Eventually, the teens start to internalize these messages.

"These teens feel unwanted. They have no self-esteem."

Dennis tells me about his uncle, who has never finished high school. Now in his 30s, and with only two credits left to complete before he can graduate, he hasn't pursued his diploma because of feelings of inadequacy. He feels ashamed, and like he would be out of place among high schoolers. I ask if Dennis thinks his uncle knows about the resources and alternative pathways available. He doesn't think so but is going to follow up and let him know.

I ask Dennis what he does differently, how he stays motivated. "One of my mentors," Dennis mentions several mentors during our conversation, it's obvious these trusted adults have been paramount to his success so far, "He told me to text myself the names of four people who care about me. Then, if I'm feeling discouraged, or like I can't go on, I look at that list and think about how they'll feel if I don't succeed." An interesting methodology.

This October will mark Dennis' third trip to an Aspen gathering with the Coalition. He originally got connected to the Coalition through a community partner, the Flint & Genesee Literacy Network. Though at first he was reluctant, he's extremely glad, in retrospect, that he decided to engage.

A graduate of Grand Blanc High School (a few minutes southeast of Flint), Dennis tells me his father was murdered when he was seven and then within a period of less than five years he lost grandparents, several aunt and uncles, and a lot of the adults who could have been positive influences in his life. After these adverse experiences, Dennis only kept his grades up high enough to play sports, while his sister, now in her final year

of college, always got straight As. "Once, when she was a sophomore in college she got a B and it made her cry." Their gender roles, his sister as the studios one and Dennis as the athlete, were reinforced by extended family. "They would ask her what was the last book she'd read. Me, it was about the points I'd scored. They decided sports were it for me."

By the time he was a junior at Grand Blanc, Mr. William's grades were slipping. He had stopped caring about sports and started skipping classes. "Finally, they pulled me into a conference room and told me I was 11 credits behind what I would need to graduate on time." Dennis felt overwhelmed, he didn't know how he was possibly going to catch up.

"Up to that point I had only cared about three things. Sports, being fresh, and girls."

Dennis made a decision in that conference room, he was going to do better. His first step to changing his trajectory took him to a program called Center for Student Success (CSS for short), which supported him as he worked to catch up. "My first day, walking in, they told me you are somebody. That was big." It had been a long time since anyone had made Dennis feel important. "They told me I was a leader. I couldn't believe it." But a leader Mr. Williams became.

Fast-forward, and for the past two years CSS has invited Dennis back to speak to the current students. He even brings along t-shirts to hand out. They say, "Graduate then repeat." He loves the experience to be back in his old school. If anyone had told him, 4 years ago, that he would be walking the halls as a guest motivational speaker he never would have believed it. "I tell students 'You control school, school doesn't control you.' Meaning students are the customers and clients for schools "You can't teach to an empty classroom. Teens need to understand they are the masters of their own education. I wish I'd known that back then."

According to Dennis, education is vital. Education and mindsets make the all the difference for young people. He emphasizes that it's never too late, people, entities, schools, municipalities, we shouldn't be giving up on our youth. Dennis looks at his peers, at other kids in Flint [age 16-24] and sees opportunities. Opportunities for engagement, empowerment, leadership, and change. "I tell them to read, I tell them to banish all negativity, just shut negativity out of their lives."

Dennis is excited to be working with the Flint & Genesee Opportunity Youth Coalition. He finds meaning and purpose in inspiring and mentoring other youth.

"I want to do for others what was done for me. So many great people have poured into me, now it's my turn."

Dennis Williams is unlike any of his peers. His passion and motivation are evident. "You never know who you are influencing. People tell me all the time, they say "If Dennis can do it, maybe I can do it too.""

That is exactly the kind of sentiment Dennis inspires. The Flint & Genesee Opportunity Youth Coalition is confident in Dennis' ability to identify and recruit additional Opportunity Youth to assist with building and improving pathways to education and employment for this group. It is our honor to spotlight Dennis Williams and his excellent and ongoing work.

6. Were any products or tools developed during this reporting period? If so, please attach them to this form (or include links).

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The Flint & Genesee Opportunity Youth Coalition as working to grow and enhance the Service-Providers Referral Tool, developed during this reporting period, which can currently be found at <http://opportunityflintandgenesee.org/service-providers-referral-tool/>. The tool was designed by the Coalition to help streamline referrals and ensure that the individual/agency making the referral can search the system for services and programs for their clients and discover partners for future projects and to align services. Two providers have registered so far, and the Coalition will continue promoting the tool and developing procedures and mechanisms to ensure the tool is kept up to date with the most relevant and timely provider information.

A note on the budget:

We have had some unexpected timeline shifts over the past program year. There was less staff-time billed to the grant than anticipated, and parts of the data-gathering and processing that were expected to take place this past year are just now getting underway. Additionally, it is anticipated that one individual who was a contract employee in the past and who has now moved into a part-time position and will be spending time on this work. Finally, as the Youth Advisory work ramps up there will be additional costs for supports for the Opportunity Youth, the Peer Facilitator, potentially space, and other resources for that work.