

Lessons Learned from Youth Opportunities United: A Successful Application for the Comprehensive Strategy to Prevent Serious, Chronic, and Violent Juvenile Delinquency*

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Abstract

The article examines a strategy known as Youth Opportunities United (YOU) developed in Corpus Christi, Texas. It is a voluntary collaboration of multiple agencies and individuals interested in reducing juvenile delinquency through programs focused on prevention, intervention, sanctioned care for adjudicated juvenile delinquents and aftercare of those juveniles released from sanctioned situations.

Resumen

El artículo analiza una estrategia conocida como Oportunidades Unidas de los Jóvenes (YOU) desarrollada en Corpus Christi, Texas. Se trata de una colaboración voluntaria entre varios organismos y personas interesadas en la reducción de la delincuencia juvenil a través de programas centrados en la prevención, intervención, autorizando cuidados para los delincuentes juveniles juzgados y post tratamiento de los menores liberados de situaciones sancionadas.

Key words

Juvenile delinquency, prevention, community collaboration, Corpus Christi

Palabras clave

Delincuencia juvenil, prevención, colaboración de la comunidad, Corpus Christi

Introduction

In 1997, Corpus Christi was chosen by Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to be one of five Texas pilot sites for its comprehensive strategy to address serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders. This strategic process emphasized the importance of building community collaborations based upon identification of community needs and assets using local data incorporating well-researched, best-practice programming to prevent and to intervene in juvenile delinquency. To be selected as a pilot site, Corpus Christi and Nueces County submitted the Corpus Christi Commission on Children & Youth's *Master Plan* which focused on reducing juvenile crime, child abuse, and drop-out that had been developed through

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an extensive planning effort (Commission, 1997). The vision statement created for an earlier community visioning exercise, Vision 2000 and the Texas Cities Action Plan (T-CAP), became the guiding vision for this process.

Corpus Christi and Nueces County will be a community committed philosophically and financially to the well-being, education and success of children. Government, schools, and individuals will work together diligently, interacting and sharing ideas and concerns to improve the quality of life for all citizens. Everyone will be an active participant in promoting a safer and healthier community (YOU, 1999).

OJJDP provided technical assistance and training to develop a “comprehensive strategic plan as a framework for reaching the roots of juvenile delinquency” and bringing this vision to life (YOU, 2001). In 1998, a citywide meeting was held with identified child advocates from multiple disciplines and agencies to present the comprehensive strategy process. This meeting initiated the planning process that became known as Youth Opportunities United (YOU).

YOU is a voluntary collaboration of multiple agencies and individuals interested in reducing juvenile delinquency through programs focused on prevention, intervention, sanctioned care for adjudicated juvenile delinquents and aftercare of those juveniles released from sanctioned situations. Since its inception, YOU has improved collaborative efforts, restructured the local juvenile justice process, gained legislative change, and expanded resources in support of its vision. This success and the early development of YOU are related to grounding in a proven process, an understandable theoretical construct, and prior community planning efforts.

YOU and OJJDP’s Comprehensive Strategic Planning

Engaging in a Proven Process. In introducing this comprehensive strategy to its Texas pilot sites, OJJDP emphasized that it was an ongoing planning process, which included “mobilization, assessment, planning and implementation” phases (Mondoro et al., 2001). OJJDP stressed that this process must be “data driven, research based, and outcome focused” based on a “philosophy of balanced and restorative justice” developing a continuum of community services that provide the “right resources for the right kid at the right time” (Coolbaugh and Hansel, 2000, p. 2).

To accomplish these goals, the community must be unified: to identify children needing prevention services; to improve networking and information sharing within the community; to identify and strengthen existing programs that were effective; to identify gaps in services throughout the continuum and develop new programs designed to fill those gaps; and, to continually monitor and evaluate all parts of the process (Coolbaugh and Hansel, 2000, p. 2). From its first organizing meeting in 1998, YOU adopted this community wide, holistic approach eventually engaging over 90 agencies and 300 individuals in the planning process. As indicated in the current YOU structure (Chart 1), YOU engaged key leaders, but supervised the planning process through a Steering Committee and performed the necessary tasks through Workgroups and a Youth Council. Liaison and coordination was maintained with other significant planning bodies in the community.

The process requires a community to identify the risk factors challenging youth and the protective factors insulating them from risks. Both types of factors are based on research that clearly demonstrates their impact on youth development (OJJDP, 1998: Developmental Research, 2000; YOU, 1999; Coolbaugh and Hansel, 2000; Morley et al., 2000; YOU, 2001). This analysis of the community was designed to lead to the identification of risk factors specific to the community as the baseline data used to plan corrective targeted programming. YOU's Data Collection and Analysis Workgroup examined 18 risk factors through collection of 52 data indicators. This effort continues so that more than 130 indicators are now routinely updated (Zambrano & Rhoades, 2004).

The analysis of protective factors in the community by the Resource Assessment Workgroup provided a snapshot of services and identified the gaps in services available to the youth. This Workgroup examined the services of over 70 agencies assessing the availability of resources addressing children from birth through 18. The survey looked at each agency's accessibility or openness to children, their adequacy or ability to help prevent juvenile delinquency, their appropriateness in dealing with children at risk, and acceptability to the children's family in meeting their needs. Existing programs were also evaluated as to whether they met the full continuum of services for juvenile delinquency: prevention, intervention,

sanctioned care, and aftercare. The Workgroup's inventory of services has been expanded and is maintained as a guide to services frequently distributed in the community. This process has assisted like-minded agencies in forming collaborations that can use the data to develop grant applications and new programs to better address the needs of the community.

An Understandable Theoretical Construct. Central to the Comprehensive Strategy's planning process is the theoretical construct of the social development strategy (OJJDP, 1998; Developmental Research, 2000). This construct provides the explanations of the links between data indicators and risk factors, between protective factors and risks, and between best practice programs and protective factors. The social development strategy proposes that programs, in best practice design, can encourage youth to develop healthy beliefs and clear standards and help to establish strong bonds to normative behavior through skills that are learned, applied in provided opportunities, and rewarded through recognition. The OJJDP technical assistance effort provided texts such as those referenced above, work books, and charts that made these relationships explicit. The planning process developed both the use of the constructs' language and familiarity with the linkages within the workgroups and the larger YOU participant group. The materials provided were used to inform the community, were converted to charts such as Chart 2, and into simpler diagrams showing limited programs with protective factors and relating risk factors as in Chart 3. Charts 2 and 3 permitted the participants to visualize the theoretical connections between practice in programs, positive community, family, school, or individual change, and the reduction of risk and reduction of problem behaviors. These tools were effective in demonstrating how the YOU process would contribute to attaining the community's vision.

Grounding in Prior Planning. Corpus Christi is also the site of a long history of child advocacy. In the early 1980s, child abuse prevention advocates organized an umbrella organization to coordinate development efforts, the Child Abuse Prevention Council of South Texas (CAPCOST). CAPCOST engaged in action planning several times in the 1980's that left it with the realization that their effort needed to involve broader segments of the community. CAPCOST members participated in the Vision 2000 process in 1990 and in the following T-CAP planning process for moving that vision forward. In 1992, the T-CAP initiative focused on reducing youth crime largely due to the presence of long-time child advocates. The T-CAP

recommendations included the establishment of a commission for children in the city (NCPC, 1994). Following that recommendation, the City of Corpus Christi established a Commission on Children and Youth in 1994. At about the same time, The United Way of the Coastal Bend's Project Compass was engaged in assessments and strategic planning that also addressed the needs of the region's youth and channeled charitable funds to those efforts. The United Way effort helped to inform the Commission on Children and Youth that spent 18 months in establishing its first *Master Plan* in the spring of 1997.

The YOU comprehensive strategic planning started from the Commission's effort. Therefore, the Corpus Christi community entered the YOU process with leaders already committed to the basic vision, people with experience in planning and coalition building, and a community with a basic foundation of information focusing on needs and assets. A fundamental belief was that no loss of effort or reinvention should occur within this new planning effort. The YOU process should start where the Commission left off and build from there. Many of the initial participants in the YOU strategic planning process not only had prior planning experience but also had worked in multiple coalitions. Thus, YOU planning began the critical building of networks and shared understandings on a pre-existing foundation (R. West, personal communication, January 31, 2005).

YOU's Adaptation of OJJDP's Process

Coolbaugh and Hansel (2000) identified seven key success factors that worked for the first comprehensive strategy pilot sites. Each site had one or more influential community leader(s), had agency and community support, worked to maximize existing resources and systems, involved the media in marketing the process, sought out the training and technical assistance available from OJJDP, and each achieved accomplishments that reinforced the planning and implementation processes (Coolbaugh and Hansel, 2000, pages 9-10).

Stable, Yet Changing Leadership. Corpus Christi's prior collaborations and visioning processes addressing youth needs set the stage for OJJDP's pilot site nomination. Having champions with political and public stature was critical in bringing youth advocates and agencies to the table to

begin the process. (R. West, personal communication, January 31, 2005; P. Dinn, personal communication, February 9, 2005). The Mayor of Corpus Christi, the Nueces County Sheriff, the United Way of the Coastal Bend, The Kenedy Foundation, OJJDP's Technical Assistance Team and the Governor's Office, Criminal Justice Division were the conveners for the mobilization phase of the process. Through the Mayor's and Sheriff's participation, both the City and County assigned dedicated staff to the process, who have remained active participants. The Kenedy Foundation, a regional charitable foundation, has provided both guidance and networking outside the county and with other foundations. It also funded some early efforts of the coalition. The United Way of the Coastal Bend also provided financial and staff support, assigning several staff to the planning committees and to the Steering Committee. The Governor's office and OJJDP provided funding, technical assistance and advice on grant writing.

The City of Corpus Christi, Nueces County and the United Way continued their support after the YOU Comprehensive Strategic Plan was developed in 1999 and representatives from each entity comprise the Executive Committee for YOU. A key strength identified by one of these leaders is that the overall process is not dependent upon the leaders who started it because several have moved out of the area. He saw that the YOU had the capacity to reinvent itself depending upon the current needs of the initiative. (P. Mastrangelo, personal communication, February 2005). New leaders from the City, the United Way, and school districts have entered the process. Leaders from the Chamber of Commerce and Workforce 1 entered as planning demonstrated the need to engage the business sector more fully.

YOU participants made a conscious decision to call leaders "community partners" so that no one would be offended if they were left out of the original planning efforts. When identified, other partners could be added. Both the community partners and the YOU Steering Committee experience changes in personnel every year. Integrating these new leaders has caused retraining of the initiative to keep everyone working toward the same vision and cognizant of the process. Through its ongoing data and resource assessment efforts YOU can continuously renew the County's knowledge level and YOU's Steering Committee "can encourage key leaders to do the right thing" -reducing juvenile delinquency with research proven outcomes focused programming. (P. Dinn, personal communication, February 9, 2005).

Community Support and Turf Issues: Sharing Vision, Sharing Work. In the initial meetings leading to the development of the comprehensive strategic plan, the participants adopted the T-CAP vision statement, developed an organizational structure assigning work groups and accountability (See Chart 1), and developed the YOU identity. Since many of the participants had worked together for years on similar planning initiatives, they had developed trust and confidence in each other and community buy-in was made easier.

In addition, the presence of an outside consulting team provided the authority to encourage greater compliance at the local level because they were seen as experts and were not tied to any local constituency. (P. Dinn, personal communication, February 9, 2005.) OJJDP and the Governor's Office brought research proven programs to YOU's attention, which challenged the collaborative to make the necessary commitments to implementation of outcome focused efforts. (R. West, personal communication, January 31, 2005).

Community support and avoidance of turf issues were also related to the nature of the YOU entity. Intentionally, YOU was not incorporated. Thus, it has had no staff, no budget, and no "turf" to protect. It has not been a competitor for resources in the community. When staff support has been needed, it has been provided by members of the collaboration or grant funding has been solicited and directed to fiscal agents from among the lead agencies involved in that particular effort.

These lead agencies have shared responsibility for maintaining the YOU initiative (J. Alley, personal communication, February 3, 2005, T. Niskala, personal communication, February 7, 2005). Among the original three agencies, the City, the County, and the United Way, the latter was perhaps the most important in gaining community support and avoiding turf issues. The United Way enjoyed a positive reputation, was able to mediate between the City and County at times, could encourage participation from among its funded agencies, and was also not a program seeking support itself. Its position as a "neutral party" and community asset had great influence on the willingness of others to participate in the collaboration.

Since not every person is a “natural collaborator,” there have been turf problems and personalities have been an issue. The vision of the YOU was broad enough to encourage anyone interested in youth to keep their attentions on developing solutions for all children in the county. When turf issues and personalities have hampered collaboration, YOU members refocused the discussion on the need to build a stronger network to help all children. Both the YOU Vision and the OJJDP’s theoretical construct have been used to demonstrate that all individuals and agencies in the community have a stake in the future of the community’s children and have important roles to play in creating that future. Most often individuals and agencies that have posed barriers to their participation have been met with broadly based offers to assist in removing those barriers and strong encouragement to become fully engaged in the collaboration.

Identifying and maximizing existing resources. One of the strong planning tools of the YOU comprehensive strategy planning process was the development of workgroups that assessed local resources, analyzed how decisions were made in the governmental organizations that dealt with children, and analyzed how legislative policy systems worked. Work groups also developed a marketing plan and a plan to incorporate a Youth Advisory Council into the overall plan. Several people interviewed for this paper suggested that these systems needed additional review now that the collaborations have become more integrated (Robin West, Veronica Treviño and Paige Dinn, personal communication, January/February 2005).

YOU’s Resource Assessment Work Group evaluated the existing programs that assisted children to create its original plan (see discussion above). In 2000-2001, funds were received to expand the resource assessment to include faith based programs and business programs working with youth. Analytical reports were produced from these assessments. A special resource directory was distributed with information about the public programs and faith based programs assisting children. The directory is maintained and updated. It is distributed widely.

Even as the *YOU Plan* was still being written, actions were taken to establish collaborations or improve processes that would enhance existing services. For example, a Mentor Network was established among those agencies supplying and/or needing mentors. A physical transportation system for case specific data was created within the juvenile processes

due to a lack of computers and computer compatibility. Computerization of the municipal court's juvenile records was assisted through volunteer and educational internship placements.

YOU supported or sponsored the development of issue specific forums, action planning, and coalitions regarding child protection, truancy, teen pregnancy, and juvenile substance abuse. In the early stages of each of these, the effort was directed at sharing information, establishing referral systems, sharing training, and coordinating existing services before efforts to seek additional resources began.

Integrating Training and Technical Assistance in the Community. YOU greatly benefited from the training and assistance offered by OJJDP and the State of Texas. OJJDP's process provided a significant improvement over former planning efforts because of its focus on "data driven, research based, outcome focused" programming incorporating protective factors. The guide to best practices (Developmental Research, 2000) was very useful for identifying well-documented effective programs. The other most frequently mentioned mantra was "the comprehensive strategy planning process is a *process*, not a *program*." This commitment to the ongoing process of mobilization, assessment, planning and implementation was unanimous between the Executive and Steering Committee members interviewed.

YOU has gone a step further by providing its own training and technical assistance to community agencies. Training efforts have been directed toward improving the fit between program and need within planning, decision making, and grant writing in the community. YOU, in cooperation with CBAY (Coastal Bend Alliance for Youth), The United Way, the City, and others, has provided training to the board and grant recipients of the Community Youth Development program, the board of the City's Weed and Seed Project and City staff, executive directors and staff of United Way funded agencies, school district personnel, and boards and staff of non-profit agencies. Training has been provided in data collection and analysis, evaluation, planning, and grant writing.

One result of the YOU training effort is that the data driven, research based, outcome focused concept and the design of programs based on risk and protective factors have been

integrated into the proposal review processes with the Weed and Seed Project, the Community Youth Development Project, and the United Way.

Targeted Marketing. The YOU Communication, Outreach, and Media Workgroup developed means to communicate with local news media, potential partners, and the general public. It developed the YOU logo and byline, created a brochure, gained assistance of a local television channel to produce a video for public information about YOU, established a web site, and held press conferences (YOU, 1999). The video was used as an introduction for presentations made by Steering Committee members and Workgroup Chairs. During 1999, the year the original plan was published over 100 presentations were made to public audiences.

Early wins. The United Way provided seed money for a grant writer for the YOU. Within the 1999-2000 time period, over five million dollars in grants were obtained through the YOU Grants Office. These grants were targeted at the resource gaps identified in the assessments performed in the planning process and brought in community partners with a proven track record of success in addressing needs of children to be the grant agents.

The following initiatives resulted from the YOU plan in 1999: Nueces County's Juvenile Assessment Center, Mentor Network, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, America's Promise--Youth Summit, Early Head Start, The Family Life Center, Success By Six®, and Safe Communities (YOU, 2002). Each of these initiatives has brought in new agencies and collaborators who have learned about the benefits of collaboration.

Several problems in the functioning of juvenile justice related systems were solved or addressed early on. An example is that juvenile cases could not be monitored within the municipal courts because the filing system was disorganized and paper based. An applied experience placement of a university student and collaborative efforts between YOU members and with the municipal court led to the computerization of these records.

Success Factors Leading to Overcoming Barriers

Challenges and obstacles that other comprehensive strategy sites have had include: difficulty coordinating the data collection necessary to do the initial assessment of the risk and protective factors critical to developing the planning and decision making necessary to make the process productive; ameliorating the “turf issues” that inhibit collaboration and a coordinated vision; structuring the scheduling and time devoted to the process; and, ensuring that the entire community was involved by building trust and commitment to the vision (Coolbaugh and Hansel, 2000, p. 10).

YOU continues to encourage people to come to the table in two critical ways. First, the Data Collection and Analysis Work Group (Chart 1) has become institutionalized into the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. This ability to use student interns provided the data critical to risk and protective factor analysis for planning. In addition, having current data on risk trends provides reasons for initial participation and continued collaboration among community partners. All data collected by the SSRC is available for anyone who needs the data for grant writing or evaluations. At each bimonthly YOU Steering Committee meeting, the data are updated and new reports are distributed. Compact discs are available by request and have been distributed widely through the region. Members of the Steering Committee make many presentations to community groups on the status of youth in Nueces County from the data, charts, and reports provided by the SSRC. Showing relationships between cause and effect, demonstrating results, and showing theoretical connections through good data have brought people to the initiative. This is especially true of the business community who are most concerned with outcome related data (T. Niskala, personal communication, February 7, 2005).

Second, in 1999, two months after the plan was written, the United Way funded a youth community grant writer whose job was to write collaborative grants for youth-focused programming along the prevention-after care continuum. YOU’s Resource Assessment Work Group’s findings indicated that Nueces county needed to: expand/increase programs for children prenatal through age 10; expand/increase programs addressing extreme economic deprivation; support collaboration to increase adequacy of youth programs; and, focus on prevention programs (YOU, 1999, p. 6).

YOU's grant writer has been charged with building community collaborations that can address these needs and to assist in the development of grants to funding sources, such as the U.S. Department of Education and Texas/other foundations. Due to collaboration within the YOU Steering Committee, the grant writer has had immediate access to the latest data collected by the SSRC. In the increasingly competitive world of grant writing, having accurate current data makes the grant application more credible and having a strong collaborative makes it more fundable. To date, YOU grant writing efforts have brought over \$26,000,000 into Nueces County since August of 1999. This figure may be a significant undercount of reality because the data collected by YOU has been distributed widely and individuals/agencies using the data have not reported the receipt of grants to the YOU initiative. Most small agencies cannot afford a grant writer and many do not have the skills to be successful at raising funds through grants. The availability of grant writing assistance has been a powerful incentive to come to the table.

The more we work together, the stronger we get. YOU brings people to the table. We have to understand that YOU is not about bringing in just programs. Through our assessment process, we need to help agencies that do good on a small scale, do good on a broader scale. YOU should continue to invite people to the table, but they have to do their part too; they can't hold grudges for not being involved in every grant application (V. Treviño, personal communication, February 7, 2005).

Data collection on the risk and protective factors was a critical, positive enhancement for the YOU initiative (J. Alley, personal communication, February 3, 2005). The SSRC at the University was changed from a periodic research entity to a more permanent resource employing professional staff and graduate students working on data collection funded by short-term grants. By utilizing the skills of criminal justice professor, Dr. Philip Rhoades, the data was located with less time and effort and was professionally analyzed which was a great surge forward in developing the YOU Strategic Plan in 1999. Dr. Rhoades' analysis of the significantly detrimental risk factors earned him the nickname of Dr. Doom when he talked to many community groups about the status of Nueces County's youth. After evaluation of the first YOU preventive and intervention grants, the presentations began including the short-term positive

outcomes resulting from the programs being implemented. Presentations stress the research base, theoretical background, and expected outcomes as demonstrated by the data.

The YOU grant writing position was also made permanent by moving it into the Workforce Development Board's oversight. Both the grant writing and data assessment offices have never received operating funds from the collaborative grants. They have been supported by supplemental funds from partner agencies or foundations, which pay for administrative costs, or through the State. This has been intentional so that no one agency can claim ownership of the grant writing process and the grants will remain collaboratively focused.

YOU implementation efforts have been made focusing on early childhood education efforts, programs for teen mothers, after-school delinquency prevention programs, mentoring projects, and more. Each has been supported by grant writing with needs statements produced from the YOU data collection. Each has been a collaborative effort across many agencies and each evolved out of the original YOU strategic plan. The following section addresses key successes in YOU planning and implementation efforts.

Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Initiatives Resulting from YOU Planning and Implementation through 2006.

Structural Changes. Perhaps the most complex integration of services into the YOU planning process was the enhancement of the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC) and the development of the Juvenile Court. The JAC had evolved out of the TRIP Center, an early program developed by the Coastal Bend Alliance for Youth (CBAY) to reduce truancy in Corpus Christi area schools, which was only available during the normal workday. The JAC is now available 24 hours a day to process truants, juvenile curfew violators, and minor juvenile offenders. This has significantly improved intervention for youths engaging in risky behavior. The JAC became a program under the Corpus Christi Parks and Recreation Department that is funded through the Crime Control and Prevention District.

At the city level, a Municipal Juvenile Court linked with the JAC was created to permit the timely assessment of youth and family needs and the immediate referral by the Court to the JAC's services and follow-up procedures. It is located next door to the JAC allowing for quick processing of juveniles and requires the attendance of parents and/or custodial adults in the determination of the program the juvenile must follow to avoid or to minimize negative sanctions available under the law. In addition, a dedicated Family and Juvenile Court was established with the creation of County Court at Law #5. This Court has concentrated expertise and standardized the processing of juvenile delinquency and Family and Protective Services custody cases.

Also, a procedure for information sharing among the Municipal courts, Justice of the Peace Courts, Juvenile Probation Department, JAC, and school districts has been created. Parts of this system have become formalized and computerized. This facilitates tracking of at-risk youth and leads to the development of accurate assessment and individualization of treatment plans. Caseworkers are assigned by the JAC to follow each of the juveniles brought to the Center to assist them in meeting the requirements of the courts and to minimize their participation in further risky behavior.

Legislative Changes. The structural changes noted above required modifications of law and ordinance. The County Court required action by the Legislature of the State of Texas. The other changes required action by the Corpus Christi City Council and/or the Board of Trustees of the Corpus Christi Independent School District. Each of these entities needed accurate data describing the current status of youth at-risk coupled with the research demonstrating best-practice approaches in their deliberations to make these necessary changes.

Program Additions. Prevention programming and early intervention programs were largely missing from the community when YOU began. A wide variety of new programs or expansions of current programs resulted from YOU initiatives. These included the creation of an Early Head Start program with the Nueces Community Action Agency, the creation of an Early Childhood Education Center at Del Mar College, and the start-up of a Success-By-6® program with the United Way that all targeted early prevention and intervention. New programs for potentially at-risk youth in the 11 to 15 age range included The Family Life Center and the 21st Century After-

School Program serving nine different middle schools across four school districts. The key focus for each of these programs was to prevent juvenile delinquency by instilling healthy beliefs and clear standards. Well trained mentoring was a primary component of each of these programs. Evaluations from the Family Life Center (2000-2006), which was set up with a control group and an intervention group of at-risk students, have shown the value of at-school mentors and enrichment programs in delaying school “drop out” and risky behavior among the at-risk group.

Expanded Resources. The YOU grant writing effort described above was responsible not only for the starting of the programs just listed, but it brought in twenty six (26) million dollars of new grant monies to the community from 1999 through 2005. Some of the programs are perpetual and funding continues to be received for them. Several programs shown to be reducing risky behavior were not sustainable as government funding expired and funding priorities shifted.

Expanded Application of Evidence Based Decision-Making and Planning. Several hundred community leaders and staff members of government and non-profit agencies were introduced to evidence based decision-making and strategic planning. These processes have been integrated into the planning process for the Corpus Christi Commission for Children and Youth and are reflected in its master plan that is updated annually. The same is true of the Nueces County Plan to prevent crime and child abuse that is annually updated within a process at the Coastal Bend Council of Governments. The City’s Community Youth Development grant program is now evidence based. All of these processes improve decision-making, target planning, and lead to more successful grant writing for revenue expansion.

Ongoing Collaboration. The YOU collaboration provided a successful example and encouraged the development of additional collaborations as listed above. An ongoing collaboration in regard to youth issues is co-sponsored by the Coastal Bend Alliance for Youth and the Commission for Children and Youth. The Youth Continuum of Care Coalition unites organizations that strengthen families discouraging alcohol and drug use. The Coastal Bend Alliance for Youth is broader and supports efforts to improve conditions for youth and families.

Summary and Conclusions

The YOU comprehensive strategic planning process continually works to mobilize, assess, plan and implement solutions to juvenile delinquency that are data driven, research based, and outcome focused and which enhance protective factors while reducing risk factors facing children. In this brief review of the successes of the YOU, it became clear quickly that the Executive and Steering Committee members interviewed are committed to the comprehensive strategy planning process. It has been successful in improving the lives of children in Nueces County by providing them with more programs that directly targeted risk factors while strengthening protective factors (YOU, 2002, 2004).

These outcomes have been tied to three major systemic changes that the YOU process engendered. First, the networking engendered by the process greatly improved the sense of community and dedication to the vision statement. While networking had occurred in prior planning efforts, it was greatly increased by two other important changes resulting from the YOU process. These are the up-to-date data relevant to describing the condition of Nueces County's risk and protective factors developed through the SSRC and the resource development successes contributed by the YOU grant writing office. Current data has been important to support systemic change in agencies and institutions, in presenting legislative alternatives, and in providing the justification for requested funding to support programs that have been demonstrated to produce successful outcomes. The successful collaborative grants written under the aegis of YOU have been greatly enhanced by the readily accessible data that demonstrated the great needs and great potential of Nueces County.

In conclusion, the members of YOU's Steering Committee who are responsible for the oversight of the planning process share their advice on the comprehensive strategic planning process. "It [the process] has become a way of life, a way of thinking. It is so important to be data driven, research based, outcome focused. We must do continual assessment to be aware of what's coming ... to meet our basic survival needs. Corpus Christi is now better able to access increasingly scarce funds." (M. Boone, personal communication, February 7, 2005). "While

the money being brought in is useful, what is more important is that we are now collaborating for the common good versus simple personal interests. We need to build this understanding of working for the common good into the fabric of community so that our leaders will understand this. ... The data is a great fallback which helps us choose what issues to go for. ... The outcome focus is important. Why is child abuse going up? Why is juvenile crime going down? Now we can look for the answers” (P. Dinn, personal communication, February 9, 2005). “YOU is like a think tank sometimes. We can use our lessons learned to influence other organizations.” (P.Mastrangelo, personal communication, February 2005).

In closing, it is important to celebrate successes as another expert tells us. “A failure of the social service structure is that it doesn’t brag about its successes. The structure is too focused on needs, which are negative versus the services that are provided, which are positive. By basing the assessment on achieving outcomes, we can ask, “How can these benefits be strengthened? What are the assets we can build on?” (R. West, personal communication, January 31, 2005).

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Chart 1: Youth Opportunities United Organizational Structure.

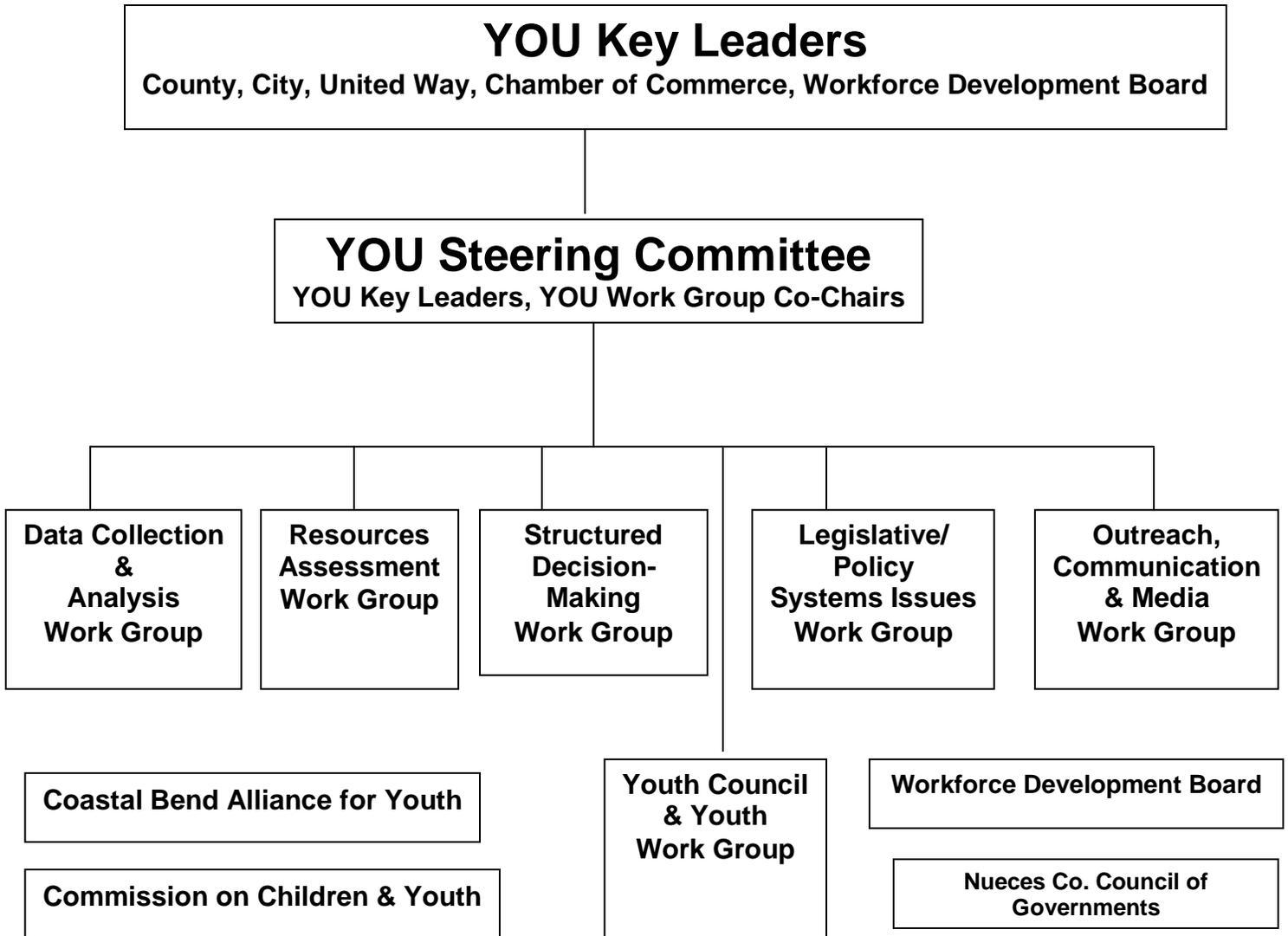


Chart 1: YOU Risk and Protective Factors with Related Programs (OJJDP Comprehensive Strategy Model)

EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS DEVELOP PROTECTIVE FACTORS TARGETING RISK FACTORS

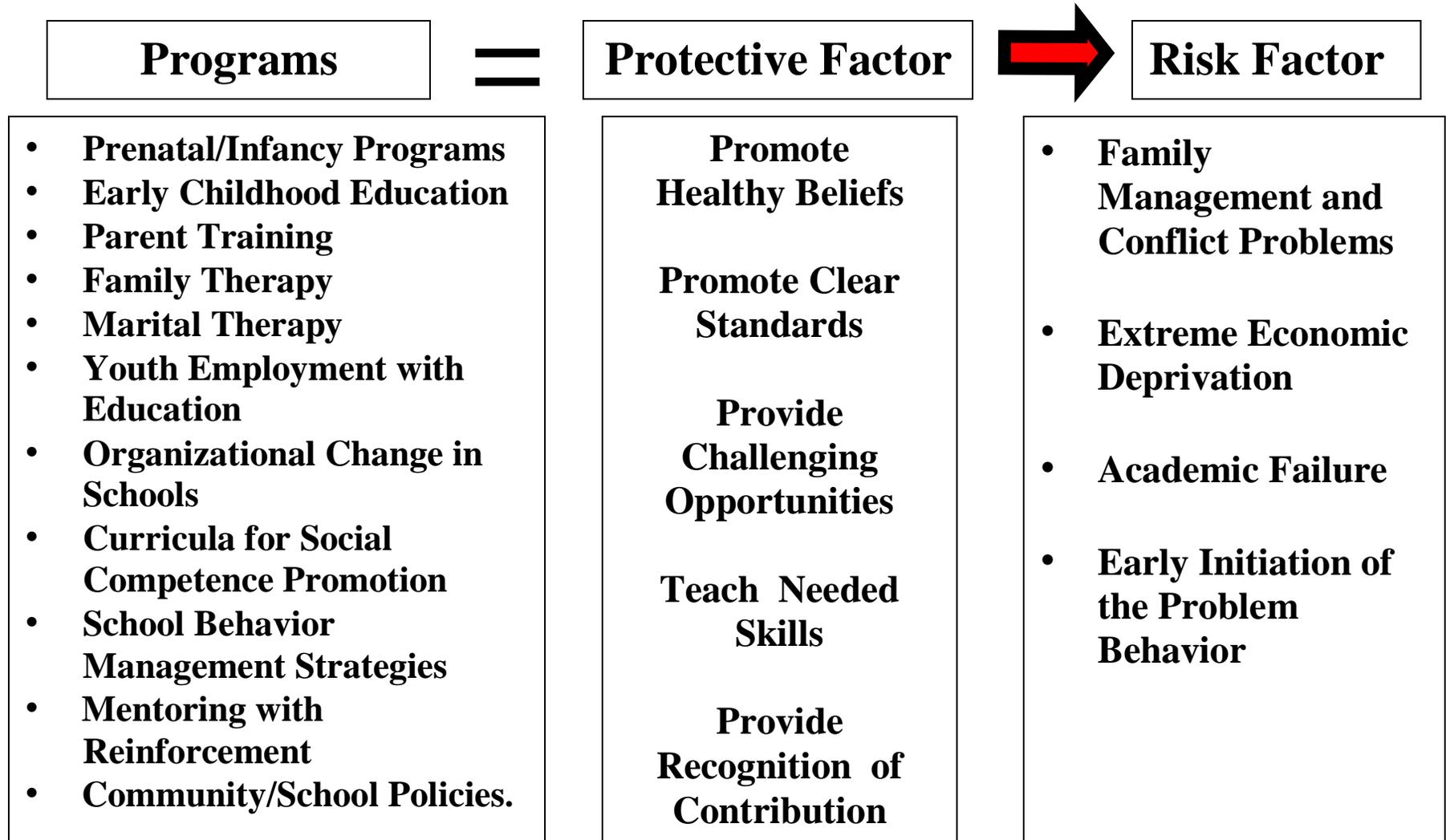


Chart 3: Presentation Model of Comprehensive Strategy Process.

Social Development Theory

