

Grappling with Big Picture Change

*Philanthropic Efforts
to Change the Odds
for Children and Youth*

By Nicole Yohalem, Brittany Anuskiewicz
and Karen Pittman



The Forum for Youth Investment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are **Ready by 21: ready for college, work and life.**™ This goal requires that young people have the supports, opportunities and services needed to prosper and contribute where they live, learn, work, play and make a difference. The Forum provides youth and adult leaders with the information, technical assistance, training, network support and partnership opportunities needed to increase the quality and quantity of youth investment and youth involvement.

The Forum believes that all young people need and deserve intentional investments and opportunities for involvement through at least the first two decades of life. These investments must move beyond solving problems and promoting academic achievement to supporting a full range of positive outcomes — helping young people grow physically, socially, emotionally, personally, ethically, civically, vocationally and intellectually. Further, youth need more than just programs — they need a full range of basic services, formal and informal supports, and challenging opportunities. The various policies, systems, professionals and volunteers working for and with young people in the allied youth fields need support and encouragement in working together to improve the lives of the nation's young people. The Forum uses the term "allied youth fields" to refer to the complex space where people such as child welfare advocates, service/learning researchers, after-school practitioners, prevention specialists, youth development funders and education administrators intersect.

core operating division of impact strategies, inc.

This document was developed with the generous support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Printed in the U.S.A. • May 2006

SUGGESTED CITATION: Yohalem, N., Anuszkiewicz, B., & Pittman, K. (2006, May). *Grappling with Big Picture Change: Philanthropic Efforts to Change the Odds for Children and Youth*. Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc.

© 2006 by Impact Strategies, Inc. All rights reserved. Parts of this report may be quoted or used as long as the authors and the Forum for Youth Investment are duly recognized. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted for commercial purpose without prior permission from the Forum for Youth Investment.

Please contact the Forum and Impact Strategies, Inc. at The Cady-Lee House, 7064 Eastern Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20012-2031, T: 202.207.3333, F: 202.207.3329, youth@forumforyouthinvestment.org, www.forumfyi.org for information about reprinting this publication and information about other publications.

Introduction

For far too many of today’s young people, a successful future is out of reach. Estimates suggest that only four out of ten young people are “ready” by the time they reach adulthood — meaning they’re working or attending college, in good health, and active in their communities.¹ While public interest in the status of children and youth is strong, fragmented programs and policies combined with decades of quick fix solutions have created a situation where the well-being of our nation’s young people has become everyone’s concern and no one’s sole responsibility.

The Forum for Youth Investment believes that changing the odds for children and youth means changing the way that we — those of us working in the array of youth-related fields — do business. The philanthropic sector is an important part of that “we.” Not only can foundations change the way they think about and invest their resources; they also play a critical role in encouraging or discouraging behavior change among the rest of that “we” — the range of key stakeholders and providers in the field whose work they support.

Small foundations have historically been perceived by many in the children and youth fields as the foot soldiers of philanthropy, funding an array of direct services but perhaps lacking the staff, resources or clout necessary to address the root causes of poverty or to influence, much less lead, systemic change efforts. With their focus often very local, and in the case of family foundations, shaped by the specific interests of family members, many such foundations are critical players in the well-being of local communities but may be less comfortable in the systems change and policy worlds.

Based on work we have done over the past several years with small foundations struggling to think outside of the box, however, we suspect this landscape may be shifting and that more small and local funders may be thinking more strategically about shaping and leveraging their investments in children and youth issues. Given their shared interest in these questions and their commitment to strengthening the philanthropy sector, the Annie E. Casey Foundation supported this small-scale inquiry into these issues. We started by asking key individuals (*see* Appendix A: Project Advisors) to help us generate a short list of mostly small family, independent, corporate and community foundations they felt either were, or might be open to thinking about their role in systemic change related to children and youth. We then had in depth conversations with fifteen of them over the past several months (*see* Appendix B: Participating Funders).²

As suspected, most of the foundations we talked with have in fact been grappling with these very questions. Many are making intentional efforts to address social change, systems reform, scale and sustainability. Whether they have revisited their grant-making priorities, engaged in a strategic planning process or developed a new theory of change to guide their work, they are not satisfied handing out money one grant at a time, and find themselves heading into sometimes uncharted waters to figure out their role in what we call “big picture change” for children and youth.

1. Gambone, M.A., Klem, A.M. & Connell, J.P. (2002). *Finding Out What Matters for Youth: Testing Key Links in a Community Action Framework for Youth Development*. Philadelphia, PA: Youth Development Strategies, Inc., and Institute for Research and Reform in Education. Available online at www.ydsi.org/YDSI/publications.

2. During February–March 2006 we conducted and analyzed interviews with senior staff at 15 foundations (*see* Appendix B for a list and Appendix C for the protocol). We also collected and reviewed a range of documents from those foundations describing their priorities, as well as several national reports on trends in philanthropy. This report draws on these data sources, the Forum’s Ready by 21™ framework and our prior experiences working in a consulting capacity with individual foundations.

Philanthropy and Big Picture Change

The Greater Milwaukee Community Foundation

The Greater Milwaukee Community Foundation (GMCF) is actively reflecting on the effectiveness of its youth-related grant making. Realizing that children and youth grow up in families and communities, not programs, they are taking a hard look at their priorities and asking their board and staff tough questions about the difference they are making in the lives of children, youth and families. This has led to a “shift” in the way they do business.

Traditionally focused on improvements in the public education system, GMCF challenged their long-held belief that this alone would level the playing field for vulnerable children and youth. In determining with their board how to spend discretionary funding, the usual interests in educational and employment programs emerged, but staff concerns centered over the persistence of poverty. Jim Marks noted, “We’re pushing back to say this is much more complicated than education alone and we have to develop a multi-pronged approach to address the issues of poverty. You could have a fantastic education system but if kids aren’t ready to participate in it, and haven’t had the early childhood development and training and all of that, it’s not going to work.”

Recognizing the need to broaden its focus from education to the root causes of poverty, GMCF brought in outside experts, including researchers and foundation peers, to learn more about the range of supports and services children and families need to thrive and the barriers they face in accessing them. The Foundation is currently reformulating their grants program to focus on developing pathways to increased earnings and assets, stronger and healthier families and safe and supportive communities.

We found that funders thinking about big picture change tend to have struggled with some version of the same core question: *Is funding individual programs enough to net lasting change?* Regardless of how they arrived at this question, some kind of evolution occurred or is underway in their thinking that has broken open new perspectives on change and their role in it.

The following themes emerged from our conversations and are explored briefly below. By framing them as challenges we do not intend to suggest that no one is making progress against them. On the contrary, you will find below and in sidebars throughout this report examples of cutting-edge work underway in communities around the country, where foundations either have addressed or are busy addressing some of these challenges in their evolving efforts to change the odds for children and youth.

- Framing the issues
- Supporting systemic change
- Finding focus
- Balancing competing demands
- Playing different roles
- Leveraging investments
- Demonstrating impact
- Avoiding isolation

Framing the Issues

As in any organization, how questions are asked or how issues are framed has an enormous impact on what kinds of solutions are generated. Jim Marks of the Greater Milwaukee Community Foundation (*see sidebar, left*) explained, “In the past we had what we called a youth development unit. We’re still doing a lot to focus on youth, but we’ve moved into a different paradigm. We’re focused on the issue of persistent poverty. Helping people transition out of or avoid poverty requires a multi-pronged approach.”

Communities cannot successfully address the issue of persistent poverty without addressing the needs of youth. Using this broader lens has the potential to add depth and variety to the range of youth-related strategies that are identified.

At the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, Wendy Lewis Jackson described how their vision related to children and youth is nested inside of broader goals. “Our vision for children and youth services in the community is part of an overall set of interconnected goals that deal with economic prosperity, vibrant neighborhoods, academic achievement, healthy people and social enrichment.” Embedding youth-related goals within a broader ecological framework increases the likelihood that specific problems will be addressed with an eye to context, conditions and sustainability.

Supporting Systemic Change

Many foundations we talked with have shifted from isolated programmatic investments to focusing at some level on systemic change. This does not mean they do not fund programs anymore, nor does it simply signal a shift from funding individual programs to funding systems of programs. It can mean a range of things, including funding community collaborations, coordinating investments with other funders, using a common framework to support long-term change or ensuring that better information is available at the community level about how efforts are adding up. Carol O'Donnell of the Connecticut Community Foundation noted, "We need to look at how the individual programs we fund relate to the change we're trying to make. It's easy to get scattered, but we're trying to put more money into multi-year grants that will support systemic change."

Michael Schmidt of the Ford Motor Company Fund described his organization's evolution on these issues this way. "We've done a strategic reevaluation of our education giving, and are looking more at the education pipeline — how the system is working and how young people flow through it and into the workforce. We try to be strategic in terms of why we are giving a particular grant, where it fits along that pipeline and how it is going to support or strengthen the pipeline. We are looking at plugging leaks, making sure programs work together and looking across the entire Fund at how to leverage limited dollars."

Of the many funders focused on systemic change, most also acknowledged how complex and undefined the road to such change really is. Gayle Williams of the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation noted, "The routes out of poverty are both personal and structural, and in order to address structural issues, change needs to happen from the grassroots level up, and from the institutions down. When those two miraculously connect, that's when you get larger change. The big question is how to get those two to connect."

Finding Focus

Some of the challenges inherent in adopting a big picture approach to change are unique to foundations, while many are not. One thing many funders struggle with is real pressure — sometimes internal, sometimes external — to get *focused*. A recent report advised the philanthropic sector this way: "For foundations, a smaller field of vision can mean greater effectiveness."³ That depends, one might argue, on how effectiveness is defined.

If what a foundation wants is tight evidence that an isolated intervention made a difference for the children who participated in it, then the above statement might hold true. But if funders are interested in lasting, systemic change, as our recent conversations suggest, narrowing their field of vision may not be the answer — or at least not the only answer. The argument isn't not to focus — it is to focus on different types of things. One can choose to focus on saving a tree or on saving a forest — different strategies, equal chance of success given adequate resources. The best strategy for trying to

The Eckerd Family Foundation

For the Eckerd Family Foundation, making a difference for vulnerable youth means doing much more than making grants one program at a time. Although the Foundation sees real value in supporting and replicating model programs, they have struggled with the question of how to restructure the systems that most impact the lives of youth to ensure better coordination, efficiency and effectiveness.

In 1999, this newly formed family foundation framed its vision in terms of helping at-risk youth. A year and a half later with Mr. Eckerd's passing and a decision to spend down the endowment by 2014, staff and board reconvened to revisit progress, refocus the vision and discuss ways to measure impact and influence sustainability. With only three employees, this small foundation set about to influence public thinking through various forms of advocacy — representation on advisory councils, partnerships with other funders, and relationships with state agencies to strengthen its influence on the foster care and juvenile justice systems.

Effective system reform and lasting change occur, Jane Soltis, Executive Director, explained that effective system reform and lasting change occur when "public opinion and policy makers are persuaded through communications and advocacy processes." Through these kinds of partnerships, she and the Foundation have helped create flexibility in foster care funding, encouraged the state juvenile justice system to broaden its mission to promote positive youth development principles, collaborated with youth to re-craft legislation, and lobbied for important changes in state statutes.

As a small, locally-focused foundation with connections to national networks and funders, Eckerd may be uniquely positioned to have real impact. It has access to the kinds of key state and local policy and decision makers that yield significant influence yet are difficult for national foundations to reach, and at the same time knows how to leverage resources that national foundations and organizations bring to the table.

3. Mittenthal, R. (Updated 2002). *Effective Philanthropy: The Importance of Focus*. A Briefing Paper. The Conservation Company. Available online at www.consco.com.

The Connecticut Community Foundation

The Connecticut Community Foundation (CCF) has a long-held tradition of working to address the needs of all its communities. Every ten years, the foundation conducts a needs assessment to determine what issues the community is facing and to develop programs and initiatives to address gaps in services and supports. Most recently, the foundation has broadened its priorities to consider the impact it can have on systems change.

For the past 15 years, the community foundation has had youth development as one of its priorities, supporting a range of youth programs. Recently, however, while working with a consultant to map community assets, staff realized that what was sorely lacking was an intermediary that could serve as a neutral convener for youth organizations, and provide them with opportunities to come together regularly to discuss issues, needs and opportunities.

As a result, CCF supported the development of the Prevention Policy Board. Meeting monthly, youth organizations and state agencies are developing a plan to identify programs, gaps and opportunities to work together. Now with state funding in hand, the intermediary has convened state agencies to develop plans to address barriers in family eligibility for services. Carol O'Donnell, Executive Director, explains, "What began as identifying gaps in terms of service eligibility led the foundation to serve in a convening role, bringing agencies together to look at what needed to change. It was a programmatic initiative that led to more of a policy strategy. We now fund an agency that plays that intermediary role and have transitioned it into the community where it belongs."

save the forest, however, is probably not to develop growth plans for 1,000 individual trees.

Many funders experience this tension between thinking big and getting focused. As Sandra Treacy of the Stone Foundation put it, "You have to be very savvy about where to put dollars into systems change. It's much easier to put money into a direct service program with kids in it. That's a lot easier to think about." Jane Soltis of the Eckerd Family Foundation (*see sidebar, page 3*) echoed this concern. "It can be harder to convince the board of broader initiatives, particularly because we are time-limited. But if we just give out responsive grants, we won't see systemic change. That drives us as a staff. We've embraced the philosophy that we have to change those systems."

Gayle Williams of the Babcock Foundation also raised the issue of managing board expectations on the question of focus. "Our board has consistently said they want to know each investment is making a difference, but they also understand that the bigger issues are so interwoven that if you pick just one categorical thing to do, you limit your ability to create change."

Balancing Competing Demands

In addition to ensuring that their boards see the value of and support systemic work, foundation staff often find themselves walking a fine line between competing demands and perspectives. Community foundations that work with donors and are committed to being responsive to issues raised by the community may experience this tension more acutely than others. Not only do they have to weigh the pros and cons of different approaches to supporting improvements in youth programming, they have to juggle these decisions with decisions in other areas.

Carol O'Donnell of the Connecticut Community Foundation (*see sidebar, left*) noted, "As a community foundation we want to address all kinds of needs in the community. But it's so easy to get pulled in so many different directions. Youth development is a strong priority, but we've also got a major nursing shortage. And we don't have good health care. You can see the connections, but still get pulled off in one direction. It's something my board and I continue to struggle with — staying focused and yet remaining open."

Funders working in corporate foundations or contribution departments must manage the additional variable of matching their philanthropic efforts with corporate priorities. At the Ford Motor Company Fund, Schmidt affirmed this reality. "We have to balance what we think is the right thing to do with what is the smart thing to do, in that it matches with corporate objectives. It's an interesting line to walk. It's always philanthropic but it's also going to have to touch on the corporate mission, goals and strategies."

Rachel Quisenberry of the Cummins Foundation noted that as foundations think about reach, a tension exists between breadth and depth. "The type of local grant making we do takes a lot of attention and time, because we like to dedicate a lot of time to talk to and work with our grantees. That's the way we like to do business. It will be a challenge to see whether we can maintain that as we consider what we need to do to have a broader reach."

Playing Different Roles

In some cases a foundation or an individual program officer is uniquely skilled and positioned within a community to lead big picture change. They may convene key stakeholders around a shared vision for children and youth, orchestrate ongoing change initiatives, create shared accountability mechanisms across sectors, etc. (*see sidebar, right*). More often, foundations are in a position to make sure such “change makers” exist somewhere in the community and have the mandate, support and visibility they need to be effective.

Either way, doing big picture change work inevitably requires pushing the traditional boundaries of philanthropy.⁴ Several funders we talked with have found themselves playing a range of new roles including convener, capacity builder, initiative leader and advocate. For some, these roles may not be new, but are now seen less as support roles and more as strategic ones. Katie Brisson described how the Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan has worked to carve out a meaningful role on some larger issues. “We look for areas where we see that alone we would be unable to help at the level necessary. Then we look at what’s happening in the community on that issue and how we might fill a role, often as convener or fundraiser.” Playing these roles may be a powerful way to leverage change, and taking them on can allow foundations to find “focused” ways to contribute rather than step away from big issues.

Wendy Lewis Jackson described how the Grand Rapids Community Foundation found itself moving into the policy realm, almost by accident. “We were feeling our way around this broad initiative-level work in child welfare. Looking beyond programs led to a realization that administrative rules and legislation needed to change in order to ensure our agenda was moving forward. The risk tolerance level was high, and the foundation began talking with and convening legislators and lobbying for specific policy changes that would lead to better results for kids.” While their forays into policy advocacy began in a limited way and were connected specifically to their foster care work, policy advocacy now carries through all of the Foundation’s initiatives.

Leveraging Investments

Nearly every funder we talked with — regardless of budget size — said they struggle with figuring out the best way to spend limited dollars. Given that reality, all are thinking about how to leverage their investments. According to Katie Brisson at the Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan, “We are rarely the sole funder of any project, and with every grant, we look at how we can bring other money into the mix. We try to bring grantees together and leverage information so they aren’t all trying to get the same data. It takes time, and doesn’t always happen outside of our core initiatives, but as we grow and get smarter, we will do this more.”

The New Mexico Community Foundation

Reeling from several well-publicized, negative reports about the state’s child well-being statistics, five years ago the New Mexico Community Foundation stepped into a leadership role. Realizing the need for systemic solutions, the foundation set out to engage a myriad of leaders in government, businesses, nonprofits and communities to take inventory of the state’s child and youth issues.

Through a collaborative process, the group identified systemic problems such as lack of coordination and accountability in and across government agencies, lack of community and youth engagement in decision making, lack of alignment in policies and resources, lack of trust in government and the need for informed, mobilized constituencies. As a result, a Children’s Cabinet was created to coordinate state agencies, policies and resources and a Youth Alliance was created to engage youth from across the state to advise the governor, lieutenant governor and legislature on policies and funding priorities related to New Mexico youth.

The Foundation recognized a need and an opportunity to stretch beyond the role of grant maker to community conveyor and catalyst for change. Although they are climbing a steep hill, a collaborative spirit has emerged across New Mexico towards improvements for children, youth and families. As Steve Patrick notes, “The state government is clearly about to change youth related policies...the community partnership supported by the Youth Initiative is uniquely poised to dramatically inform those changes for a positive impact.”

4. Brown, P., Chaskin, R., Richman, H., & Weber, J. (2006). *Embedded Funders and Community Change: Profiles*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

The Jacobs Family Foundation

Less than ten years ago, the communities that built Market Creek Plaza were not even considered in San Diego's redevelopment plans. The Jacobs Family Foundation responded to these distressed, low-income neighborhoods with few resources and many needs with more than simple grants, recognizing the important role youth and adult residents must play in making economic and community improvement decisions.

The foundation developed the Jacobs Center, an independent organization supporting resident leadership, voice and participation in community revitalization. Through a multi-level process of listening to resident issues and concerns, supporting resident-designed solutions to systemic inequities, and regular, open communication with the public, residents implement and evaluate their own community redevelopment plans. Sustainability is ensured both through resident ownership and the foundation's leveraged investments with diverse partners such as businesses, government and private funders.

Through an intentional and inclusive process, the foundation built respectful and trusting partnerships with community residents, helping develop their capacity as change makers in their own community. Today, Market Creek Plaza is a thriving cultural and community center where young people and their families shop at a wide range of stores, eat at popular restaurants and enjoy community events and programs. Now recognized as a successful model of economic development, San Diego has redrawn plans to include this area and the residents it once ignored.

Melody Baker of the Hazen Foundation pointed out the important role that philanthropic affinity groups and funding collaboratives can play in helping build relationships between foundations that lead to funding partnerships. “We leverage our funds through connections with other foundations that we make by participating in the Funders Collaborative [on Youth Organizing] and other affinity groups. But something else we do, and need to do more of, is build relationships with local foundations in the areas where our grantees are located. Those are more sustainable relationships for those organizations, right in their own backyards.”

Demonstrating Impact

Nearly all of the funders we talked with struggle with the issue of accountability — how and for what to hold their grantees and themselves accountable. Fully participatory, community-driven and -owned processes like those of the Jacobs Family Foundation (*see sidebar, left*) can build a unique sense of accountability across stakeholder groups, particularly while work is underway. But figuring out ways to assess and understand the long-term impact of investments is incredibly difficult, especially when it comes to the capacity building, advocacy or systemic change work that is important yet one, if not several, levels removed from the daily experiences of young people.

For Jane Soltis of the Eckerd Family Foundation this is an ongoing challenge. “We know that in 2012 when we stop making grants, we'll have to answer the question, ‘Did we make a difference?’ We're pretty good at documenting what kinds of investments we've made and the results of those individual investments. But we have no real internal indicators. I guess we will look back and ask, ‘Have programs been sustained? Have we changed public thinking about kids in juvenile justice? Have we been able to leverage our investments through collaboration with others?’” Asking these questions is critical. Asking them early and often can address accountability issues but also guide grant making, documentation and leadership activities.

In response to the accountability challenge, the Hazen Foundation (*see sidebar on page 7*) recently engaged consultants to help them develop a baseline assessment of where the youth organizing field is and where individual organizations (their grantees) are. “In five years we'll figure out if any of the indicators of success we developed in our strategic plan, for ourselves and the field, have been achieved,” noted Melody Baker. Michael Schmidt of the Ford Motor Company Fund concurred that accountability “is really hard and we're struggling with it.” We are starting to move away from relying on informal feedback to develop measurement systems that are more precise at capturing what difference they've made. “We are trying to create a ‘value index’ to look at our investments, figure out whether we're making a difference or not, and if not, how programs can be improved.”

Avoiding Isolation

While most if not all of the funders we talked with are actively struggling with the issue of accountability, some are doing so in relative isolation. Finding more and better ways to work collaboratively — in the community and among foundation peers — emerged as a priority for many people we

spoke with. Sabina Shelby of the Hampshire Foundation put it this way: “Finding ways to network with top notch people and other grant makers who can give me informal insights continues to be a challenge for me. It makes learning so much faster and decision making so much better when I make the time for it.”

The need for support and strategic advice seems particularly strong when it comes to complex systems-change work. Wendy Lewis Jackson of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation underscored this point. “These major initiatives take a lot of different skill sets to pull off, and as more of us get into this work we’re going to need help developing them. Getting all of these different systems to come to agreement on anything is hard. I’ve found it difficult to find best practice resources on how to manage this kind of work.” Other funders echoed the value of funder networks and supports that are linked to their missions, citing both the Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing and the Youth Transitions Funders Group as critical resources.

The Edward W. Hazen Foundation

The Edward W. Hazen Foundation is a small foundation with a big agenda. After spending over 70 years focused on various interests related to youth and public welfare, the foundation underwent a shift in thinking, pushing beyond funding youth programs in general to focusing on youth organizing efforts that aim to change the systems and policies that affect youth.

Over the last 15 years the foundation has recognized the important role that youth and families should play — particularly in low-income communities of color — in participating in decision making to influence community and systems changes. As Melody Baker explained, “The youth development program started out a little more traditional, in the sense that 20 years ago it funded after-school and literacy programs that didn’t necessarily engage youth in decision making within those organizations.”

After several “waves of thinking,” the foundation now supports efforts that contribute to the development of young people as leaders for social change. Hazen recognizes that systemic racial and social inequities have undermined the positive development of low-income youth and young people of color, and that it is essential to ensure that public institutions and communities support the healthy development of all young people.

Hazen’s theory of change is grounded in the belief that a trained and organized youth constituency can play an active role in their own development while contributing to improvements in the conditions of communities. Working specifically with youth organizing groups already in existence and through multi-year grants, they have also supported coalitions and networks to bolster the field’s capacity to have a greater influence on the systems that impact young lives.

Frameworks for Big Picture Change

States and communities need “big picture change makers” — organizations or individuals with the capacity, motivation and mandate to track across-the-board change efforts on behalf of children and youth.

The eight challenges described in the last section mirror many of the issues that other stakeholders committed to big picture change, outside of philanthropy, grapple with as well. The Forum has had opportunities to support and learn from individuals situated in a variety of organizational homes at the state and local levels, who play catalyst roles related to children and youth issues. From this work, we have developed a general framework that depicts what needs to happen in order to change the odds for children and youth. That framework may provide a useful backdrop for reflecting on and responding to the challenges described by funders.

Following decades of fragmented programs, policies and advocacy efforts that have confused the public and left too few young people ready for productive futures, few would disagree that continuing with business as usual is not going to move the dial for vulnerable children. But thinking differently is hard, acting differently is harder and acting together is harder still. Nonetheless, acting together — at scale, toward common goals, on shared schedules, with the right partners may be the only way to create the sustainable improvements need to change the odds for all children and youth.

Research suggests it can take five to ten years to see significant differences in many youth indicators (e.g., teen pregnancy rates, high school graduation) that can be linked to changes in community supports. We believe it is possible within a few years, however, to see significant changes in the capacity of the structures (e.g., children’s cabinets, advocacy coalitions), initiatives (e.g., school reform, youth master plan development), and champions (e.g., politicians, business leaders) that play key roles in strengthening policies, programs and public demand. Moving the small gear (see Figure 1) can make a big difference.

Coordinated expansion of community supports is critical. Each organization picking its own issue doesn’t necessarily work in the long run. States and communities need “big picture change makers” — organizations or indi-

Figure 1

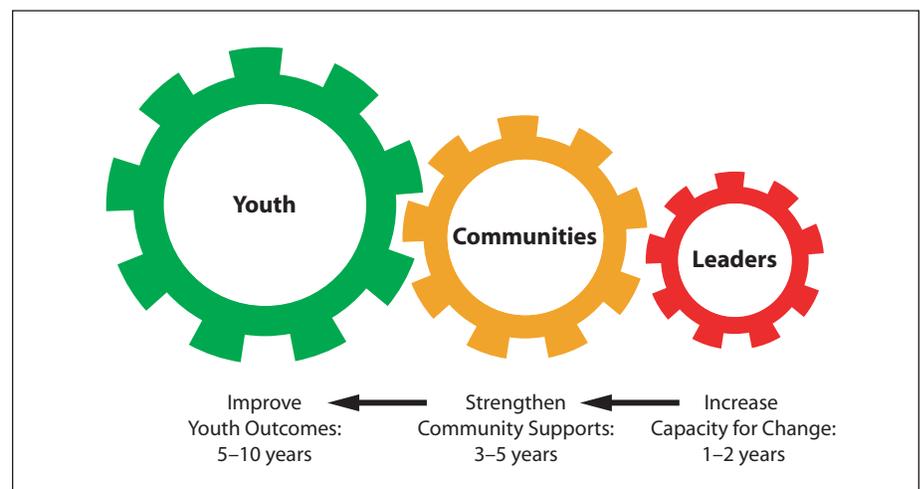
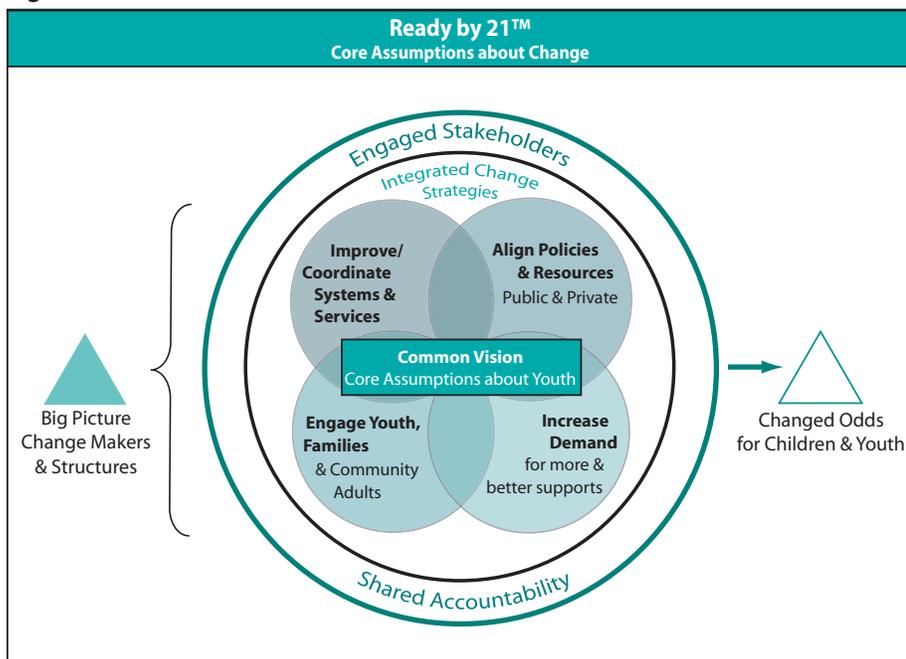


Figure 2



viduals with the capacity, motivation and mandate to track across-the-board change efforts on behalf of children and youth. These change makers can emerge from the provider community or from advocacy, policy or philanthropy roles. Sometimes they are formally charged with monitoring the big picture — other times that role evolves informally over time.⁵

By championing a “big picture approach” to children and youth that includes a shared vision, shared accountability and interconnected change strategies (see Figure 2), individual and organizational change makers challenge leaders across systems and sectors to improve outcomes for all young people.

Foundations can play concrete roles in engaging stakeholders to accept shared accountability for a common “actionable” vision — a vision that puts their priority area in context. Even if a foundation remains committed to a particular issue or population, they can begin to invest in improving their community or region’s overall horsepower for change by intentionally investing in big picture strategies (e.g., increasing demand, aligning policies and resources) and by making investments in ways that increase overall capacity for change. These strategies do not have to be issue specific; investing in a multi-issue advocacy organization or training intermediary creates overall capacity that can be brought to bear on a range of critical issues.

We believe that relatively small investments in monitoring and linking efforts that are underway in communities can significantly increase the return on investments in children and youth and the institutions that support them. These increases can, in turn, boost public and policy maker confidence that the problems are malleable, progress is measurable and programs and policies matter.

We believe that relatively small investments in monitoring and linking efforts that are underway in communities can significantly increase the return on investments in children and youth and the institutions that support them.

5. The Forum for Youth Investment. (2005). *The Ready by 21 Challenge: Helping Young People Be Ready by 21*. Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc.

Conclusion: Supporting Big Picture Change

Foundations are not simply broadening their focus beyond individual grant making to more systemic approaches. Many are fundamentally backing up, thinking about what needs to change, and reframing their goals in that context. As a result, many are shifting their focus from supporting specific programs or fixing specific systems to achieving a cohesive set of outcomes for children, youth or families.

In order to achieve those outcomes, funders are looking for ways to make some sustained changes — in policy, in specific systems, in public opinion — changes they believe will get things moving in the right direction, toward the desired outcomes. In the process of doing this work (or in some cases as a result of the process), these foundations are bringing more flexibility to what roles they play and what strategies they support.

These shifts in thinking and action within the philanthropic community are to be commended. It is our opinion, however, that they also need to be supported. Organizations charged with supporting foundations or interested in informing their work can learn from their reflections and respond to the challenges raised in this paper — e.g., balancing competing demands, playing new roles, avoiding isolation — with more strategic supports, coaching and networking opportunities.

Issue-focused funder coalitions appear to net strategic, big picture initiatives. Regional consortia or grant maker networks can provide greater opportunities for funders to come together to take aim, take stock, and take action on the big picture. Big picture change doesn't necessarily require that foundations pool funding or share decision making. Common frameworks, common language and common information can increase the return on individual and collective investments.

Funders Value...

- Local, regional, national philanthropic networking
- Sharing ideas and lessons in small peer groups
- Leveraging funds through foundation partnerships
- Participating in diverse community coalitions
- Trainings and forums hosted by neutral conveners
- Participating in diverse funder collaboratives
- Technical assistance on large-scale initiatives
- University partnerships on documentation/evaluation
- Connecting to local youth service provider networks
- Partnering with state agencies and councils
- Summaries of recent child and youth research
- Media partnerships to publicize initiatives

Appendix A: Project Advisors*

Leslie Pine, *Vice President for Programs*
The Philanthropic Initiative

Stephanie McGencey, *Executive Director*
Grantmakers for Children, Youth and Families

Lisa McGill, *Director*
Youth Transition Funders Group

Tim Walter, *CEO*
Association of Small Foundations

Virginia M. Esposito, *President*
National Center for Family Philanthropy

Valerie S. Lies, *President and CEO*
The Donors Forum of Chicago

Nancy P. Roberts, *President*
Connecticut Council for Philanthropy

Michael Seltzer, *President*
New York Regional Association of Grantmakers

Kae Dakin, *President*
Washington DC Grantmakers

Cindy Ballard, *Executive Director*
Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth

Ira Barbell, *Senior Associate*
Annie E. Casey Foundation

* These individuals provided us with recommendations of funders to include in the project and reviewed the draft report.

Appendix B: Participating Funders

Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan

Katie Brisson
Former Senior Program Officer (now consultant)
 333 W. Fort Street; Suite 2010
 Detroit, Michigan 48226
www.cfsem.org
Type: Community
Assets: \$410,447,703
Total Giving: \$28,178,465

Mission: The Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan is strengthening the region's quality of life by building "community capital" — for today and tomorrow; enhancing the region's quality of life; engaging people and organizations in philanthropy; convening, planning and working for positive change; and supporting and launching new initiatives.

Connecticut Community Foundation

Carol O'Donnell
Director of Grants and Community Services
 43 Field Street
 Waterbury, Connecticut 06702
<http://conncf.org>
Type: Community
Assets: \$43,821,037
Total Giving: \$1,667,423

Mission: Connecticut Community Foundation invests in organizations and programs that build vibrant and healthy communities throughout their 21-town service area.

Cummins Foundation

Rachel Quisenberry, *Program Officer*
 500 Jackson Street; MC 60633
 Columbus, Indiana 47201
www.cummins.com/na/pages/en/whoweare/foundation.cfm
Type: Company-sponsored
Assets: \$5,269,661
Total Giving: \$1,456,022

Mission: The Cummins Foundation makes people's lives better by serving and improving the communities in which Cummins Inc. does business, and providing the tools and means for people living on the edge of society to overcome the barriers they face.

Eckerd Family Foundation Inc.

Jane V. Soltis, *Program Officer*
 PO Box 5165
 Clearwater, Florida 33758-5165
www.eckerdfamilyfoundation.org
Type: Independent
Assets: \$130,402
Total Giving: \$3,824,482

Mission: Eckerd Family Foundation is committed to promoting meaningful and lasting change to transform the lives of vulnerable youth and their families.

Edward W. Hazen Foundation Inc.

Melody Baker, *Program Officer, Youth Development*
 90 Broad Street; Suite 604
 New York, NY 10004
www.hazenfoundation.org
Type: Independent
Assets: \$30,734,100
Total Giving: \$1,776,400

Mission: Edward W. Hazen Foundation seeks to assist young people, particularly minorities and those disadvantaged by poverty, to achieve their full potential as individuals and as active participants in a democratic society.

Ford Motor Company Fund

Michael Schmidt, *Manager, Education Programs*
 PO Box 1899
 Dearborn, Michigan 48126-2798
www.ford.com/go/fordfund
Type: Company-sponsored
Assets: \$107,283,149
Total Giving: \$77,916,903

Mission: Ford Motor Company Fund makes awards in five categories: Education, environment, public policy, health and social programs, civic affairs and community development, and arts and humanities.

General Mills Foundation

Adrienne Jordan, *Program Manager*
 One General Mills Boulevard
 PO Box 1113
 Minneapolis, Minnesota 55440
www.generalmills.com/corporate/commitment/foundation.aspx

Type: Company-sponsored
Assets: \$29,760,824
Total Giving: \$20,199,900

Mission: General Mills invests in the people, neighborhoods and education of the communities in which they live and work. In the Twin Cities, the Foundation focuses grants in the areas of youth nutrition and fitness, education, arts and culture, social services and United Way.

Grand Rapids Community Foundation

Wendy Lewis Jackson, *Program Director*
 161 Ottawa Avenue, NW; Suite 209-C
 Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503-2757
www.grfoundation.org

Type: Community
Assets: \$194,189,277
Total Giving: \$7,691,957

Mission: Grand Rapids Community Foundation leads the community in making positive, sustainable change. Through grant making and leadership initiatives they help build economic security, foster academic achievement, support human wellness, achieve ecological integrity, create vibrant neighborhoods and enrich the lives of the people.

Greater Milwaukee Foundation

Jim Marks, *Vice-President*
 1020 N. Broadway; Suite 112
 Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202
www.greatermilwaukeefoundation.org

Type: Community
Assets: \$408,658,588
Total Giving: \$28,971,095

Mission: The Greater Milwaukee Foundation helps people establish permanent charitable funds that serve people throughout Milwaukee, Waukesha, Ozaukee and Washington counties and beyond. Because donors name each fund and choose the causes it serves, they enjoy the individuality of a private foundation. Because these funds are united under one organizational roof, they gain the superior cost effectiveness and tax benefits of a large public charity.

Hampshire Foundation

Sabina Shelby, *Managing Trustee*
 PO Box 370-326
 West Hartford, Connecticut 06137
www.hampshirefoundation.org

Type: Independent
Assets: \$12,808,423
Total Giving: \$382,850

Mission: Hampshire Foundation is a private foundation. It funds not-for-profits that promote financial and vocational training with the purpose of increasing each individual's ability to provide for themselves, their families and their communities.

Jacobs Family Foundation, Inc.

Roque Barros, *Director of Community Building*
 5160 Federal Boulevard
 San Diego, California 92105-5429
www.jacobsfamilyfoundation.org/

Type: Independent
Assets: \$33,697,371
Total Giving: \$3,296,159

Mission: The Jacobs Family Foundation invests in and with communities to seed or strengthen projects and programs that build the capacity of under-invested neighborhoods.

Kraft Employee Fund

Laura Freveletti, *Senior Manager, Community Contributions*
 PO Box 1297, Church Street Station
 New York, NY 10008

Type: Private
Assets: \$2,920,981
Total Giving: \$2,500,000

Mission: The Kraft Employee Fund's mission is to enable a higher level of employee involvement in the community and to provide employees with more say in their charitable giving. A Leadership Council comprised of a diverse cross section of employees makes the funding decisions in the following focus areas: children's services, elder services, healthy lifestyles, hunger and youth development.

New Mexico Community Foundation

Stephen Patrick, *Director, Youth and Emerging Initiatives*
 343 E. Alameda Street
 Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501
www.nmcf.org

Type: Community**Assets:** \$18,549,931**Total Giving:** \$2,962,063

Mission: The New Mexico Community Foundation is a statewide endowment-building and grant-making organization that serves and invests in New Mexico's communities and their greatest asset, its people.

Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation

Gayle Williams, *Executive Director*
 2920 Reynolda Road
 Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27106
www.mrbf.org

Type: Independent**Assets:** \$149,495,304**Total Giving:** \$6,019,399

Mission: The Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation assists people in the Southeast to build just and caring communities that nurture people, spur enterprise, bridge differences and foster fairness. The mission is to help people and places to move out of poverty and achieve greater social and economic justice.

W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation

Sandra Treacy, *Executive Director*
 Lin Ishihara, *Senior Program Officer*
 PO Box 29255
 San Francisco, California 94129-0255

Type: Independent**Assets:** \$15,192,167**Total Giving:** \$844,000

Mission: The Stone Foundation makes grants in the areas of youth development, early childhood education, and education, in the San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago, Boston and New York.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Grant Making Strategies and Priorities

- Describe the foundation’s vision, and in that context, your funding priorities related to children and youth. We’re interested both in what topics or issues you focus on (after-school, health, violence prevention) and the types of grants you make (direct service versus capital). How long are your grants, typically?
- Talk about how you arrived at this focus or vision.
- Does the foundation have a philosophy (some call it a logic model or theory of change) — either explicit or implicit—that drives your grant making? How do you decide what organizations or programs to invest in?
- Some foundations make a distinction between reactive versus proactive grant making. How do you think about this? Financially, what is the breakdown?
- Does the foundation do things to try to build the capacity of its grantees (things like training or, technical assistance)? If yes, what?
- Some foundations experience a tension between “getting focused” and “thinking big.” Funding specific programs is very concrete but can be limiting given how complex and interrelated children, youth and family issues are. Have you experience this tension? If so, how are you thinking about it? (*Alternative wording:* How do you think about whether to fund a lot of things with smaller commitments versus fewer things with larger/longer-term commitments?)
- Is the foundation involved in policy issues related to children and youth? If so, how do you decide which policy issues to address or invest in?
- Has the foundation attempted to leverage its direct investments in children, youth and family programs in order to increase impact or sustainability? If so, how?
- Do you know you are making a difference? How? Are you satisfied with your impact?
- Are there things would you like to fund but haven’t (i.e., research and evaluation, community planning efforts, local/state policy advocacy, public education)? What are the obstacles?
- This is a hard one, but what do you consider your biggest successes and challenges as a foundation?

Partnerships/Resources/Peer Learning

- What kinds of partners do you have or would you like to have in order to carry out your mission? To what extent do you connect with other foundations? Are these connections useful?
- What information or resources related to children and youth issues do you use to help guide and justify your investments? How do you and the other staff stay on top of the issues?
- Do you belong to any philanthropic membership organizations or affiliate groups? If yes, what kind of support do you receive through those organizations? What other kinds of opportunities or supports would you find useful? (i.e., training, networking, opportunities to learn from/share with peers).
- Within the region or state, do professional membership organizations get together and discuss issues?



The Forum for Youth Investment
The Cady-Lee House • 7064 Eastern Avenue, NW • Washington, DC 20012
T: 202.207.3333 • F: 202.207.3329
youth@forumforyouthinvestment.org • www.forumfyi.org