



# *Blueprint for Youth: Moving Forward*



**A summary of findings and recommendations to create a  
youth friendly community in central Indiana  
November 2013**

# Introduction

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*Imagine for a moment that you are arriving home from work early on a Friday afternoon during the school term. You turn into your street and smile. Things have certainly changed for the better in recent years, not only in your neighborhood, but also in every Marion County neighborhood.*

*A mini-bus passes, filled with middle school-aged youth going to a Boys and Girls Club recreational program five miles away. Your teenage son and his friends are walking to the church on the corner, where they'll learn tae kwon do and have pizza together after tutoring younger boys. Your daughter is spending the afternoon at a local production studio that's teaching young teens how to produce documentaries on issues that matter to them. Your children are safe and happy.*

*Your job as a parent is easier now thanks to the combined efforts and care of the community.*

That vision was created 20 years ago by a 29-member task force of parents, providers, youth, and other representatives who, with a vision of Marion County as a "Youth Friendly" community, created the *Blueprint for Action: Places to Go*. In January 1994, MCCOY released the Blueprint for Action, which cataloged all service providers, opportunities, and activities for local youth. In addition, it set forth goals for MCCOY and the rest of the community to achieve to make Marion County a more youth friendly community.

In the past twenty years, the operating framework for youth serving organizations has changed, as have the conditions for youth in Marion County. Coinciding with its 20th anniversary, MCCOY embarked on a project to revisit the original Blueprint and update the data, examine the current state of service providers, and survey the needs of parents and youth.

In partnership with Action Corps, a group of graduate students from the School of Public and Environmental Affairs' Graduate Capstone Course, MCCOY explored the goals set out in the original Blueprint and asked the questions: Is the landscape for youth in Marion County better today than it was 20 years ago? Have we reached the point where Marion County can be labeled as a "community that cares for its youth?" What has MCCOY contributed to this effort? We sought to answer these questions through this study: looking back to ask, 'where have we been?' and looking ahead to ask, 'where do we need to go?'

From this information, MCCOY has created the *Blueprint for Action: Moving Forward* that illustrates an evolved youth development community over the past 20 years and provides recommendations for the next 20. MCCOY is still committed to acting as a community conscience on behalf of youth. With the results of *Blueprint for Action: Moving Forward*, we seek to sustain and strengthen this community movement.

## 1994 Blueprint Community Vision

The Marion County community will:

- actively involve youth and parents in planning and leading activities at both a program and community level through committee, council and board decision-making;
- be known as a community that cares for its young people and supports family efforts to provide youth with safe, meaningful activities; and
- show its support through shared community resources, increased parental involvement in the activities of young people and active promotion of an effective, fun system.



# Progress in Creating a Youth Friendly Community



*"By having MCCOY act as a convener, we're being thoughtful and progressive in becoming a youth friendly community."*

**Caleb Sutton, Director of Programs and Services,  
Hawthorne Community Center**

Through the hard work and dedication of MCCOY and our many community partners, much has been accomplished in the past 20 years to achieve the vision set forth for youth in the original Blueprint. To assess Marion County's progress toward becoming a youth friendly community, MCCOY and the Action Corps conducted surveys with youth, parents/caregivers, and youth development professionals in addition to interviews with key informants. What emerged from this research was that, although much has been accomplished to promote positive youth development, there are still some recurring challenges, and emerging issues, that we as a community need to resolve in order to help youth grow up, thrive, contribute, and engage in their communities.

After reviewing the recommendations identified in the 1994 Blueprint, youth development professionals identified the degree to which the recommendations had been achieved in Marion County over the past 20 years. In sum, "Continued improvement in the landscape for youth opportunities," was seen as the most successfully achieved, while informants largely identified that recommendations regarding public transportation and youth safety, were not achieved through efforts in the past 20 years. They noted the following key improvement areas in their survey and interviews:

- opportunities for professional development for youth workers and coaches have improved;

- the quality of programming available to youth has improved;
- cooperation amongst youth serving organizations has increased; and
- funding opportunities have incentivized collaboration amongst youth-serving organizations.

In their surveys, youth report that their top sources of support are their family and friends and they have positive feelings and attitudes toward their participation in out-of-school time activities. However, the vast majority of youth reported that they do not participate in activities with their families more than two times per week and expressed a desire to be more involved. They reported feeling overwhelmed by their activities outside of school and that adults did not always listen to their ideas and opinions.

In the parent and youth worker surveys, consensus existed around the overall quality of youth programs, with afterschool, sports and summer camps being the most utilized. However, the barriers identified were convenient locations and accessibility of the programs as well as cost. Parents also identified that youth were engaging in risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol use and that an overall lack of respect and bullying were prevalent among youth. Youth workers identified that there are not enough leadership opportunities such as board participation or councils for youth to engage in.

In order to become a youth friendly community, it is recommended that we resolve these issues through improvement in the following categories: positive youth participation, safety, rights, advocacy and a positive family life for all youth.

# Recommendations:

## What can we as a community do?

MCCOY has developed the following recommendations to continue to move Marion County closer to becoming a youth-friendly community.

### Youth Participation

*Vision: A youth friendly city promotes youth involvement in the issues that affect them; listening to their views and involving them in the decision-making process.*

*The biggest challenges central Indiana youth face with regard to youth participation are transportation and a lack of neighborhood activities, venues and opportunities to voice opinions.*

#### I. NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVITIES:

##### Where we stand:

- *"We can do better. There aren't enough activities and not enough activities that are relevant to youth." (Ieva Grundy, Empowering Today's Youth Consulting and Training Services).*
- *"There should be flexibility in our day to make it more productive" (George Washington Community High School student)*
- *82% of youth surveyed said they believe it is important for youth to be leaders in their community.*

##### Solutions:

- *Get out and about – take your programs services outside of the building. If transportation is a barrier for youth getting to your program, then take your program to the youth.*
- *Organizations should offer a program(s) at a restaurant, café, or other safe venue in neighborhoods with a lack of existing programs/activities within walking distance of a highly populated youth area.*
- *Offer fun events or programs on Friday evenings or Saturdays "in order to engage entire neighborhoods. Research indicates that access*

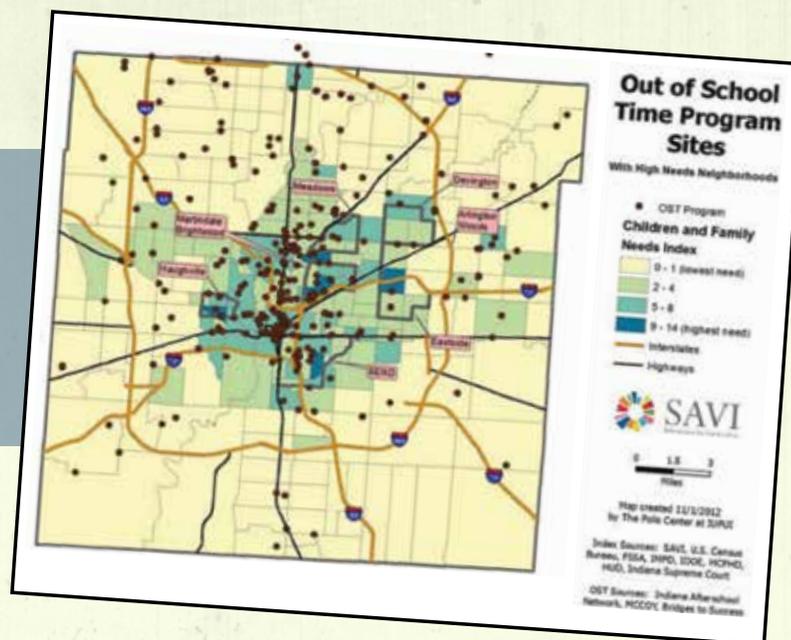
*to out-of-school time programming declines on Fridays and is very limited on Saturdays.*

##### Examples:

- *The Youth Neighborhood Association Partnership (YNAPP) program offers \$1,000 grants for youth to "create and implement neighborhood based service learning projects". Representatives from the Mayor's office in Las Vegas, Nevada and youth members from each neighborhood district sit on the YNAPP board. It is important we engage local government and youth in expanding neighborhood activities. Offering youth an active role in developing their neighborhoods gives them a voice and an incentive to work continuously towards bettering their communities.*

##### Resources:

- *The map below provides a snapshot of current out-of-school programs and their location in relation to neighborhoods in the County with numerous risk factors. Organizations should utilize data to make informed decisions about where best to locate programming and to identify organizations to partner within those neighborhoods lacking activities.*



## II. YOUTH VOICE:

Where we stand:

- "Youth these days don't want to discuss issues with their parents. We need to fashion other ways to refer to programs that reach the youth directly." (Gabriel Atilola, Indianapolis Housing Agency)
- "For decisions to be made the administration should sit down with a board of students and include student voice in all major decisions" (Indy Metropolitan High School student)
- Only 26% of youth surveyed said they felt adults in their community listened to the ideas and opinions of people their age.
- Most youth strongly disagreed that there are enough opportunities for youth to lend their voices to youth serving organizations through holding positions of power (i.e. sitting on boards, councils, etc.)

Solutions:

- Every youth serving organization should incorporate youth voice and perspective into their daily practices. Youth serving organizations can accomplish this through a youth board or council to give youth a position of leadership so they feel more connected to the organization and are able to develop the skills that come naturally from being in a position of leadership.

Examples:

- The Citywide Coordinating Council for Youth Violence Prevention started in the District of Columbia (DC) in 2009. The council is structured through the participation of three non-profit agencies that focus on a comprehensive, collaborative, and youth development-oriented approach to addressing youth violence. D.C has seen a 30% drop in youth homicides since the inception of CCCYPV, demonstrating that convening youth and giving them responsibility results in change.

Resources:

- Marion County Commission on Youth (Youth Advocacy Council)
- Mayor's Youth Council (Indianapolis, Indiana)
- Indiana Legislative Youth Advisory Council (Indiana)

## III. TRANSPORTATION:

Where we stand:

- "The transportation options in Marion County are really not very good. If you live in exactly the right place and are going to exactly the right place you can use the buses but it's difficult. And it's definitely not cost effective for parents" (Lynn Engel, Connect2Help)

- "Mobility is a huge issue for employment and access to activities," (Carmen DeRusha, Purdue Extension)
- Majority of youth surveyed did not feel they could safely take public transportation.
- Youth in the survey also indicated they did not feel safe to attend free-time activities, especially in the evening.

**Solutions:**

- Youth and youth-serving organizations should be educated about and involved in mass transit planning to ensure youth transportation needs and concerns are addressed.
- Be creative in coordinating existing transportation resources to provide youth better access to services and programs. Advocate for bus stop safety by adopting a bus stop near your program and engaging youth in maintaining the stop.

**Examples:**

- In Rhode Island non-profit organizations partnered to convene a youth led campaign focused on transportation. Youth serving organizations acting as conveners for youth led campaigns will have much more impact than adults sitting around a table. Without the youth voice, what makes us qualified to present or make decisions about youth issues?

**Resources:**

- IndyGo (Indianapolis Public Transportation)
- VolunteerMatch.Com (Utilize volunteers to transport youth)
- Church vans or buses, school buses (Reach out to local churches. Inquire with the school board as to whether or not buses are able to be used by youth serving organizations)

## Youth Safety

A youth-friendly city promotes safe communities where youth can flourish and be active members; communities where differences are accepted and youth are not discriminated against based on their differences.

Youth safety is a broad topic, and one that is relevant to both youth and adults. Through the Blueprint surveys, youth identified drug/alcohol abuse as the fourth largest issue most relevant to them, while parents identified this same issue as their number one concern with youth.

### I. DRUGS & ALCOHOL:

**Where we stand:**

- "If kids are safe it's because parents don't let their kids out of their sight. I remember when I was a kid; I'd run outside in the morning with a piece of toast in my hand and play outside all day. I wouldn't come back until the sun went down. I don't know anybody in any neighborhood who would do that now." (Lynn Engel, Connect2Help).
- 55.2% of 8th grade students report having used alcohol in the last 30 days and 18.8% of 10th grade students report binge drinking in the last

- two weeks. (Drug Free Marion County, 2013)
- Use of Marijuana and methamphetamine from youth in Grades 7 through 12 have slightly decreased. Despite these efforts use of heroine and prescription drugs has increased among young people ages 12-17. (Drug Free Marion County, 2013)

**Solutions:**

- Change the conversation about drugs and alcohol. Youth serving organizations must move beyond educating youth on the dangers of using drugs and alcohol to more proactive and "real" conversations.

- Use strength based approaches when discussing drugs and alcohol. Focusing on the negative effects of substance use is not as effective as considering the chemical reaction youth achieve from getting drunk or high and offering alternative methods for achieving the same feeling. Identify alternative ways for the youth brain to achieve the same “high” by participating in pro-social activities.
- Most youth, use drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism and this fact should not be ignored. Adopt trauma informed practices. Acknowledge that drug and alcohol use may be due to trauma a youth has faced.
- Encourage youth to start a campaign. Many youth campaigns, such as the Community Anti-drug Coalition for America and Youth Alcohol Drug Abuse and Prevention Program have launched in cities like New York and California.

*Examples:*

- YADAPP (Youth Alcohol and Drug Prevention Project) – Virginia (Partnership between VA Dept. of Education and VA Dept. of Health) hosts an annual conference to which they invite youth organizations to participate. While at the conference youth, accompanied by one youth leader, receive tool kits on how to develop a youth led initiative in your community. YADAPP has already spread into Los Angeles and Chicago.

*Resources:*

- Reach for Youth- Indianapolis
- Greater Indianapolis Council on Alcoholism
- Drug Free Marion County

## Youth Rights

A youth-friendly city promotes the access to quality basic rights for youth; ensuring awareness of youth rights among youth and their parents.

Central Indiana youth identified college/post-high school readiness and lack of employment opportunities as the biggest struggles in their basic rights.

### I. COLLEGE/POST-HIGH SCHOOL READINESS:

*Where we stand:*

- *“We have to look at young people holistically. A lot of young people come from the generational cycle of poverty. The number one thing we can do for our young people is to develop resiliency skills so they can overcome hurdles, and number two is support their educational advancement.”* (Caleb Sutton, Hawthorne Community Center).
- *“Things are handed to students and teachers need to change that- or else students aren’t able to learn anything on their own.”* (Indy Metropolitan High School student).
- 91% of youth surveyed indicated college readiness and a lack of job opportunities as current barriers they are facing.



*Solutions:*

- Begin having conversations about college and alternative options early! Many of us work with a wide age range of youth. The younger we plant the seed in a child’s mind that they are not only capable of attending college but that we have the capacity to help them get there, the more likely those youth will continue their schooling while seeing college as an attainable goal.
- Prepare youth for the non-academic challenges of college, including stress, time management, social factors, etc. Often we assume we have prepared youth for college because there are no red flags academically but do not consider their social and emotional readiness

- Present diverse college, vocational, and career options catering to varying GPA's, attitudes, aptitudes, and interests. Many universities have programs designed for low-income, first generation, and minority students aspiring to attend college (e.g. Indiana University Bloomington – GROUPS, Hudson Holland; Ivy Tech-Hoosier Link; Purdue- Horizons).

#### Examples:

- The National Center for Postsecondary Research produced a study, The College Readiness Partnership, that lays out the types of programs preparing young people for college and details the structural strengths and barriers of the programs studied.

#### Resources:

- Twenty-first Century Scholars
- Upward Bound
- IU- Groups/ IU-Hoosier Link (Partnership with Ivy Tech)
- Purdue- Horizons

## II. EMPLOYMENT:

#### Where we stand:

- *"For the youth and families I see [that a major challenge of] a lack of financial resources is the top of the list."* (Korina Galang, Department of Child Services)
- 40% of youth in the survey strongly agreed a "lack of jobs" is a current barrier for them in Marion County



#### Solutions:

- Teaching youth life skills is imperative for youth serving organizations. Incorporate programs on fiscal responsibility (balancing a checkbook, managing money, saving money, investing etc...)
- Reframe the notion that saving and investing are only for "rich people."
- Build entrepreneurial training for youth into your program. This helps youth to think critically, while offering a solution to the current lack of jobs. Youth unemployment has not been as low as it is today since the great depression. It is essential for youth to find safe and creative ways to earn money.
- Stress the importance of building a resume with experience. Many youth view having a job as a right, however we have to teach our youth to be as marketable as possible. By providing youth with leadership roles, community service experiences, and incorporating responsibility into their role as a member of the organizations they are involved in we are in turn preparing them for job success later in life.

#### Examples

- The Boston Jobs Project has developed a system to bridge the unemployment gap. By building partnerships with employers and raising money to fund the venture, the city was able to employ youth and help them to develop real world work experience. The Mayor recruited a network of employers, while police, probation officers, ministers and child services staff referred youth to the employment program. The program also offers case management and alternative education for youth involved.

#### Resources:

- The Small Business Association has an entire program and tool kit on engaging youth in entrepreneurship. ([www.sba.gov/content/youth-entrepreneurship](http://www.sba.gov/content/youth-entrepreneurship))

# Advocacy for Youth

A youth-friendly city supports nonprofit organization and independent agencies that promote youth rights.

Youth are affected by circumstances out of their control on a daily basis and it is youth development professionals' responsibility to work within their capacity to remedy these challenges through advocacy and policy change. Youth indicated they need advocacy efforts in the areas of poverty and personal health and development.



- Marion County Commission on Youth (Summer Youth Employment initiative)
- Pro 100

## I. POVERTY:

*Where we stand:*

- *"I don't think we've ever addressed the issue of generational poverty, an ongoing issues, which we have to address through a three way partnership between family, community and schools."*(Caleb Sutton, Hawthorne Community Center).
- The majority of youth surveyed identified "family problems", "a stable place to live" and "money problems" as barriers they currently face.
- The poverty level in Marion County has significantly increased over the past five years. During this time, the number of children living in poverty has grown rapidly. According to the Indiana Youth Institute Kids Count Databook (2012), between 2008 and 2011, the percentage of children living in poverty in Marion County increased from 24.0% to 31.9% compared to the national increase from 18% to 22.5% during the same five years.

*Solutions:*

- Organizations that implement trainings or programs focused on financial literacy (balancing a checkbook, taking out a loan, saving, investing, etc.) would increase the financial competency of the youth it serves and possibly the parents of those youth.
- According to a study by the University of

Manchester's School of Environmental and Development, social movements are necessary in order to bring change to an issues as a significant as poverty. The United States has engaged in the "war on poverty," for decades, however, no single program can effectively remedy poverty. Youth and adults must work together to create a social movement against poverty.

*Examples:*

- While programming is crucial to combating poverty and developing a youth friendly city, we must look to advocate for structural issues such as the minimum wage, taxes and food/resource availability, earnings, jobs for youth, food availability, etc.

*Resources:*

- Local banks (most if not all offer financial literacy classes and materials for youth and adults)
- Local 4-H (Head, Hands, Heart, Health)
- Local government (City county council meetings/members)

## II. Personal Health and Development:

*Where we stand:*

- *" People in crisis are less likely to support the healthy development of children because they're living to survive."* (Carmen DeRusha, Purdue Extension)



*"People in crisis are less likely to support the healthy development of children because they're living to survive." (Carmen DeRusha, Purdue Extension)*

- Our survey identified that two of the top ten issues affecting youth are not eating the right foods and lack of exercise opportunities.
- Over 48% of youth in our survey indicated they eat a full meal zero to once per day.

#### Solutions:

- Engage youth in food production (community gardens and "farm 2 school" programs) and provide opportunities for them to learn how to prepare the foods they produce.
- Advocate on behalf of those students involved in your organization to ensure their only meal is not one they receive at school (take time to learn which schools provide breakfast and send home meals with students in the evenings and on the weekends).
- Keep healthy snacks on hand and make it a habit to ask young people if they have eaten.
- Host regular events or sessions about body image, self-confidence and sexual education. Many youth do not receive emotional support or education about their bodies at home, so youth serving organizations can fill this void and build the confidence of youth through positive programming. This type of programming is also important for younger participants of your organization. Teenagers have often developed their overall sense of self and can learn and/or be good role-models for younger participants.

- Educate youth on healthy eating practices on any budget. Eating healthy can be expensive; however, if we teach youth to eat healthy within their means, they are still making small strides towards making better choices later on in life (i.e. portion control, healthy alternatives to unhealthy food choices.)

#### Examples:

- 4-H is an underused wealth of knowledge for not only youth but organizations looking to provide programming about nutrition, sustainable food sources, mentoring etc. 4-H also has a variety of programs that cover a wide range of topics regarding youth safety.

#### Resources

: Local community gardens have plots available to rent for individuals as well as organizations.

- Eagle Creek Park Gardens
- Mayor's Garden Plots at Tibbs Ave.
- Children's Urban Garden at Garfield Park Conservatory
- Second Helpings
- Gleaners Food Bank
- 4-H
- Girl's Inc.
- Boyz II Men

# Positive Family life

A youth friendly-city promotes positive family experiences; providing family resources and support.

As identified by research, parental involvement and engagement can be a challenge for youth serving organizations across the board. Interestingly enough, youth in our survey indicated a need to spend more time with their parent(s). A lack of parental involvement in a child's day-to-day activities has the potential to be detrimental to that child's future.

## III. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:

Where we stand:

- "We expect our parents are going to know what to do with young people. But many of them don't come from that understanding or are young parents that don't have the training." (Caleb Sutton, Hawthorne Community Center)
- "Schools should host parent workshops for how parents can help their kids better in school." (Connected by 25 foster youth)
- Over 30% of youth in our survey indicated family issues and home life as the most important issues they currently face.

Solutions:

- Request, very specifically, for parents to participate and/or volunteer when they are applying for their children to be a part of your organization. Offering parents a variety of opportunities to participate from the beginning, increases the likelihood of them participating long term. The purpose of this is not to require or mandate, but instead to help parents understand the importance of their participation to their child.
  - Host family nights. Be intentional about inviting parents and providing activities focused on building a positive parent-child relationship. Allow the youth to plan these events.
  - Host neighborhood events to encourage parent participation. Be persistent about parental involvement.

- Provide parent-to-parent (i.e. single mother to single mother) mentoring for parents. Most often, it is not that parents are not interested in their children's activities, it is more frequently the case the parent/s are young and ill informed, working, or do not feel their presence would be valuable to their children.
  - Express to parents their value to your organization through some form of parent appreciation.

Examples:

- Parent to Parent USA (P2P USA). While the Parent to Parent program partners parents of children with special needs with other parents of children with special needs it would be extremely beneficial to offer programs here in Marion County that partner young mothers with other mothers to serve as mentors. Parental involvement assumes knowledge and wisdom many parents, especially young parents, do not already have.

Resources:

- Marion County Alliance of Neighborhood Associations (McANA)
- Central Indiana Youth for Christ (Parent to Parent mentoring for young or new mothers).
- The Meridian Kessler "Neighbors Helping Neighbors" Program

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The following resources were utilized in researching of the *Blueprint for Action: Moving Forward* summary document.

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