

Growing Up Boulder Kick-Off Celebration- Final Report

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Overview

Begun in early 2009, Growing Up Boulder is a new initiative that represents a partnership between the University of Colorado, the City of Boulder and the Boulder Valley School District, working in collaboration with a growing list of community organizations (see below) and Boulder's young people. It focuses on four main goals:

- Making Boulder a better place for **ALL** young people to grow up, including the places that they play, live, work, and go to school;
- Creating connections between the University and the community through research and outreach;
- Gathering youth input for the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan Update and the creation of a Youth Strategy Plan; and
- Creating additional opportunities for Boulder children and youth to participate in community decision-making and action projects that will benefit the community and also allow the participating youth to gain skills necessary to be effective community members.

We seek to include all children and youth who live and/or go to school in the City of Boulder. After exploratory discussions in winter and spring, we began holding community meetings during the summer of 2009 in order to establish a youth engagement steering committee to help plan the kick-off celebration that was held on October 10, 2009. Over a four month period, 54 middle and high-school students were involved in the planning process, many attending numerous meetings and working sessions.

In addition, we have focused on several other forms of outreach in order to include additional young people and to get the word out to the larger community. For example, seven middle- and high-school members of the youth engagement steering committee presented an overview of Growing Up Boulder at a televised City Council meeting and invited the Council members to attend the kick-off celebration. CU faculty and students also facilitated mapping activities with over 100 AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) students at Boulder High School and they facilitated drawing and mapping activities with about 30 3rd – 8th graders who participate in the I Have a Dream Foundation program in North Boulder. In addition, two CU graduate students

facilitated a dialogue with Boulder High students to get their ideas and input about the agenda for the kick-off celebration.

In order to raise awareness about the kick-off event, several people involved with Growing Up Boulder personally invited youth during a school community meeting at New Vista High School, through a televised interview at the Boulder Farmer's Market, and through the creation of several hundred flyers and post cards that were given out at all of the Boulder middle and high schools and local businesses frequented by youth.

The kick-off celebration was held at the UMC on the CU-Boulder campus. In spite of a snow-storm, about 100 youth attended from 16 area schools, divided fairly evenly between middle- and high school and across genders. In addition, about 100 adults participated, representing a variety of youth-serving organizations such as the I Have a Dream Foundation, the Optimist Club, and the City of Boulder (many departments). The kick-off provided an opportunity for Boulder youth to participate in fun activities such as graffiti painting and hip-hop dancing, as well as talk with adult leaders about issues that are important to youth. For example, youth had an opportunity to talk with the mayor and city council members (five of whom attended), as well as members of the planning board, several city agencies, and others.

Participants

CU has partnered with the following participating organizations to accomplish the goals of Growing Up Boulder:

- City of Boulder Department of Housing and Human Services – Children, Youth and Families Division
- City of Boulder Department of Community Planning and Sustainability
- City of Boulder Department of Economic Vitality
- Boulder Valley School District
- Boulder County Head Start
- Boulder County Healthy Youth Alliance
- Boulder Housing Partners
- Growing Gardens (Cultiva!, Children's Peace Garden)
- I Have A Dream Foundation
- Natural Highs-Healthy Alternatives to Drugs and Alcohol
- Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence
- Science Discovery, University of Colorado
- September School
- Thistle Community Housing
- Voices for Children CASA
- Youth Opportunities Advisory Board for the City of Boulder

- Youth Services, Boulder Valley Women's Health Center

In addition, students from the following elementary, middle and high schools have so far participated in Growing Up Boulder:

- Arapahoe Ridge High School
- Bear Creek Elementary School
- Boulder High School
- Casey Middle School
- Centennial Middle School
- Columbine Elementary School
- Douglass Elementary School
- Fairview High School
- Horizons K-8 Alternative School
- Manhattan Middle School
- Monarch High School
- Nederland Middle and Senior High School
- New Vista High School
- Platte Choice
- Southern Hills Middle School
- Whittier International Elementary School

Through registration forms at the kick-off event we also obtained demographic information for the youth who attended. Although only 86 youth filled out the registration form, we know of other youth who did not fill out the form for various reasons. We, therefore, estimate the total youth attendance for the kick-off event to be closer to 100.

Grade:

- 3rd grade – 4
- 4th grade – 1
- 5th grade – 5
- 6th grade – 26
- 7th grade – 13
- 8th grade – 11
- 9th grade – 5
- 10th grade – 2
- 11th grade – 9
- 12th grade – 10

Ethnicity:

- Asian – 2
- Asian/Caucasian – 2
- Caucasian – 68

Caucasian/African – 1
Caucasian/Chamorro – 1
Caucasian/Hispanic – 1
Hispanic – 3
Hispanic/Chicano – 1
Hispanic/Native – 1
Indian – 1
Native American – 2
Undisclosed ethnicity – 3

Gender:

Female – 46
Male – 40

Thirty-eight adults registered at the kick-off event, and an additional approximately 40 other adults attended as well, including community leaders such as City Council members, City and County staff, CU faculty and students, and people from the Boulder Valley School District. Seven youth and two adults from the Adams County Youth Council also attended the event to learn what Boulder youth are doing in the expectation that it will help guide their attempt to do something similar in Adams County.

In total, approximately 175 children, youth and adults attended the kick-off celebration.

Funding

Funding sources for the Initiative has included:

- A \$5,000 grant from the University of Colorado Outreach Committee.
- A generous donation of \$5,000 from Cynda Collins Arsenault helped pay for additional materials and staff time.
- \$600 from the City of Boulder, \$600 from the Boulder Valley School District, and \$600 from the University to assist with food purchases and related expenses for the kick-off event.
- \$5,000 in paid staff time contributed by the Children, Youth and Environments Center.
- Substantial in-kind contributions in the form of faculty time, volunteer hours, and donated meeting space.
- Numerous small donations from local businesses and organizations, used as door prizes at the kick-off event and awarded to youth who attended.

As this is an on-going initiative, we hope to secure additional funding in order to continue the important work that has been started. The kick-off event enabled us to build community awareness about the initiative and the importance of

viewing youth as resources, rather than problems, in the community. The initiative also helped create valuable connections between CU faculty and students, City staff, Boulder Valley School District teachers and staff, local organizations, key community decision-makers, and young people in Boulder.

Findings and Lessons Learned

Prior to the event, we were advised not to do pre-registration since it might prevent youth from attending who would decide late that they wanted to just show up that day. This made it hard for us to accurately estimate the number of youth who would attend, how many workshops to offer, and consequently how many facilitators and how much food we would need. That morning we awoke to 6 inches of new snow that had fallen the night before. This was somewhat unexpected since the kick-off celebration was held in early October. Although we don't know exactly how the inclement weather impacted attendance, we had a smaller turn-out for youth than we had planned for, which caused uneven attendance of the break-out sessions, some of which unfortunately had to be cancelled.

One of the most interesting insights from this event was learning how the arts engaged youth and served as a common denominator for youth from different backgrounds. One of our first glimpses of youth enthusiasm for artwork had come when the middle- and high-school students from the Youth Engagement Steering Committee created a large banner for the 10/10 kick-off celebration. They were very excited to paint the banner, as demonstrated by their animated conversation and creative brainstorming. We saw similar enthusiasm for the arts at the kick-off celebration. Many youth chose to attend workshops on graffiti arts, dance and music. This excitement for the arts will help shape our engagement efforts for the next phase of the Growing Up Boulder initiative.

Through the process of planning the kick-off celebration, we found that children and youth are most interested in participating in hands-on activities. Going forward, we expect to involve additional young people in the initiative and focus on action projects that will create positive change in the community. We also will seek more deliberately to include intergenerational relationships and involve youth with disabilities.

On-going work

As a result of the kick-off celebration and work done prior to the event, three action research projects have emerged so far:

- 1) A project focused on identifying existing **nightlife options for youth** and determining appropriate action to increase opportunities for safe, age appropriate nightlife activities;

- 2) A Boulder **youth-friendly business survey** project designed to identify which businesses will hire minors (creating a web-based database as a public service to local youth) and which ones use youth-friendly business policies and practices. A pilot of this survey received front page coverage in the Daily Camera;
- 3) A **youth community art project** to provide opportunities for youth from different backgrounds to come together and create public murals and other community art pieces around Boulder.

In addition to these first three action projects, coordination of Growing Up Boulder is continuing to create and support opportunities for the voices of youth to be heard in decisions that affect them. The City of Boulder Department of Community Planning and Sustainability is inviting input from young people for the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan update. The Children, Youth and Families Division, in the Department of Housing and Human Services, is likewise seeking input from youth for creating a city-wide Youth Strategy Plan. In addition, we are engaging with the business community to broaden the coalition of stakeholders backing the Initiative.

We are also actively seeking ways to include more diversity in regards to race, culture, age, physical and cognitive ability, and gender. Over the next several months we will focus on targeted outreach activities in order to provide opportunities for a diverse group of children and youth to participate in the Initiative.

We plan to make a community-wide celebration an annual event in order to showcase all the work that youth are doing as part of Growing Up Boulder. We learned useful lessons from the kick-off event that will benefit a celebratory reprise to mark the Initiative's first anniversary next fall.