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Quality Review Report

NYEC PEPNet 2008 Pilot Accreditation Project

Our Piece of the Pie

20-28 Sargeant Street
Hartford, CT 06105

Quality Review visit based on
PEPNet Quality Standards for Youth Programs

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of the Quality Review Team during its site visit to the applicant program. NYEC will send this report to the program along with notification of its accreditation status.

CHAPTER I. APPLICANT AND COMMUNITY PROFILE

Present information about the applicant and the community it serves. For community, include economic information and educational attainment if appropriate. For the program, include historical information (at least number of years of operation) sponsorship, total enrollment, locations/facilities, and number and demographics of the youth served and of the program staff.

Our Piece of the Pie (OPP), whose mission is "helping Hartford youth become successful adults" began as the Southend Community Services (SCS). For over 30 years, SCS had provided a comprehensive set of services to a broad range of participants. In 1999, it was selected to lead a Youth Opportunity Grant that provided funding to a number of agencies. As the grant neared its end, SCS engaged with the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, among other funders, and began a community needs assessment and a strategic planning process that led to a narrowing of its target population and services to focus primarily on youth. In October 2005, the organization adopted OPP as its new name and began focusing services on youth between the ages of 14 to 24.

A snapshot of youth served that was compiled in mid-May 2008 showed that of the 2269 participants served across the various programs, slightly more than half the youth (52.8 percent) were female and about two-thirds were age 16-20. The overwhelming majority served were youth of color, with about 41 percent classified as being African-American and another 33 percent as Hispanic.

According to the US Census Bureau, Hartford had a population of 124,512 in 2006, with 30 percent of the population being under the age of 18. Thirty-eight percent of the population identified itself as black, and 40.5 percent stated they were of Hispanic or Latino origin. In 2000, about 61 percent of those aged 25 or older were high school graduates, and 12.4 percent stated they had a bachelor's degree. In 1999, about 31 percent of the population was living below poverty.¹

With a total budget of about \$5.4 million, 55 percent of OPP's funding comes through government contracts; the next largest funding source, at 36 percent, is through corporations and foundations. OPP operates two primary sites, one on the north side of Hartford and the other in the south. It also operates a day care facility, and has office space at a one-stop center from which it operates two programs.

¹ Hartford (city) Quickfacts from the US Census Bureau.: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/09/0937000.html>

CHAPTER II. YOUTH RESULTS

List program's expected Youth Outcomes and/or Progress Measures from Youth Performance Outcomes Spreadsheet

1. Work Readiness credential attainment
2. Placement and retention in unsubsidized employment
3. Literacy and numeracy gains
4. Credential attainment in secondary and postsecondary education
5. Placement and retention in postsecondary education
6. Placement and retention in productive engagement

CHAPTER III. QUALITY OF THE ORGANIZATION'S PROGRAM

What Currently Exists

Category 1: Management for Quality

For each standard in the category, describe in 2-4 paragraphs how the program is addressing the standard. At the end of the section for the category, identify prominent areas of strength and areas for growth for the category as a whole.

1.1 Mission

- *The organization/program has a clearly stated purpose that is consistent with its goals and activities and is based on the community and the youth it serves.*

OPP's mission statement is simple: "OPP is helping Hartford youth become successful adults." However, it reflects a relatively recent change in the organization's focus. During most of the organization's 30-year history, OPP (under its former name *Southend Community Services*) served a variety of populations. Since the late 1990s, the organization's activities have become increasingly youth-focused, culminating with a name and mission change in 2005. Since then, OPP has exclusively targeted the at-risk youth population of Hartford.

OPP's programmatic offerings which include Pathways to Success, Educational Services, and Employment Placement services aligned with the mission in different though complementary ways.

1.2 Leadership

- *The leadership focuses on the success and growth of the organization in the context of accomplishing the organization's mission.*

OPP's leadership structure is an interesting combination of consistency and change. OPP's long-serving CEO has engaged the organization in a process of change in an effort to ready the organization for the future. Toward that end, OPP engaged consultants *The Bridgespan Group* to help identify missing pieces of data on which staff and leaders could base decisions. It was suggested that OPP construct a "dashboard," a one page data sheet that would serve as the basis for future decision-making. OPP has acted on this concept and submitted the refined dashboard as part of the PEPNet application.

The CEO was also able to generate an increased level of commitment and activity from the Board of Directors, according to Board Chair, John Sundean. Part of this increased commitment involved the first Board retreat, where an outside consultant was engaged to assist the Board and leadership in defining goals and plan for implementation. From this meeting came a reorganized Board with 3 sub-committees including:

- The Executive Committee, providing the traditional oversight and support role for OPP's leadership.
- The Development Committee, focused on development of the board as a cohesive advocate for OPP as well as serving a fundraising role.
- The Operations Committee, focused on ways to improve OPP operations.

Mr. Sundean also reported that a culture of Board contributions to OPP has been firmly established, resulting in nearly 100% participation.

The significant changes in OPP leadership did not stop with the Board's reorganization. OPP has added several high-level staff positions to assist the CEO, staff leaders and the Board in accomplishing the mission of the organization. Recent additions to the staff include a Chief Operating Officer, a Director for Communications and Development and a Director of Quality Assurance. A Chief Financial Officer was also named, filling a vacancy. These additions have significantly increased the talent pool at the top of OPP's structure, allowing the CEO to focus on strategic goals.

1.3 Staff

- *Staff are qualified and competent and receive support that promotes continued learning, job satisfaction and motivation.*

Any effective youth program is dependent on a committed and skilled staff and OPP is no exception. One factor that adds to the senior staff's strength is that most, if not all, come with experiences drawn from other youth organizations. Examples range from non-profit and for-profit management to public education administration to Job Corps management, to mention only a few.

Direct care staff are committed and enthusiastic. Youth Development staff observed during an intake seems to be appropriate. Observations of staff and youth suggest good rapport is consistently established, Appropriate tone, productive discussions and a solid level of substantive expertise were observed.

The diversity displayed at all levels of staffing is impressive. Any youth from any side of Hartford, representing any background, would be able to find not just one choice of a role model but many among the staff at OPP.

Human Resource staff openly report that with the expansion of staff and changes in Human Resources policies that it is time to revise the existing Employee Handbook.

1.4 Financial Management

- *The organization/program manages its financial resources responsibly.*

Administrative functions and staff of the organization have been recently strengthened with the addition of a Chief Financial Officer and additional support staff in the accounting department.

The independent audit reports that adequate controls are in place. The audit makes operational recommendations for OPP to consider: off-site information technology back-up, expansion of the accounting staff and for creation of a succession plan. In all cases, OPP management concurred, and in two cases has already taken documented steps to address the auditor's recommendations.

One missing piece with respect to financial management is a budget report broken down by department, distributed to the department heads so that they might better monitor and control expenses. The CFO acknowledged the need for such a report and shared that it was one of the items on his action list.

1.5 Performance Accountability

- *The organization/program holds itself accountable for setting and meeting operational and programmatic goals.*

It is impossible to have a culture of continuous improvement without evaluation and accountability. OPP has set ambitious goals, adjusted staffing, altered operations and installed a database in an effort to meet these goals. They have not lost sight that the ability to meet the large strategic goals is tied to the consistent achievement of client-

centered goals. The addition of a Quality Assurance Director whose role is to create and present data for evaluation indicates the importance of accountability to the organization.

Lastly, given OPP's involvement with the PEPNet process, Edna McConnell Clark's evaluation, along with an internal evaluation, not only are they intentional about evaluation, they place high value on seeking the feedback.

1.6 Information Management

- *The organization/program develops systems to collect, store, analyze and report complete and accurate data on operational and program performance, participant demographics, services, progress and outcomes.*

Information entry and management is a continuous activity for the staff at OPP. Using the Efforts to Outcomes software from Social Solutions, the organization has prioritized the gathering of good data as a core activity. Front line staff are required to record every interaction in the student's online case file. Student progress, successes and issues are noted in ETO within the software's case notes tool. Program component completion is also tracked by the database along with extensive demographic information. Staff from the various program components also use ETO to refer students back and forth between OPP programming.

This standard of documentation using ETO is another relatively recent addition to the activity and culture at OPP. Management staff report that use is universal among programmatic staff and that implementation was relatively painless in that data entry fields remain largely unchanged from the initial implementation. Staff were trained and updated on ETO use and related policies and procedures. OPP managers stopped short of reporting that staff have been disciplined related to ETO usage. However, it was stated that managers monitor staff activity in part by inspecting contact reports and hours of contact tracked by the software as an accountability tool. It is clear that regular and accurate use to the database is an expectation at OPP.

Data entry for the sake of data entry is not OPP's goal for their database. OPP staff use a combination of ETO standard and customized reports to inform decision-making across the organization. The demographic reports submitted as part of the evidence packet are ETO reports. The program matrix also has many data points generated from ETO. These dashboards, as reported above, have become a primary reference for decision-making at OPP. It should be noted that OPP's decision to abandon the first Hartford-wide database and go with ETO was followed by all of the other major providers of youth services and the City of Hartford.

One concern shared at the debrief centered on the seemingly pervasive use of ETO. While it is acknowledged that data-driven decisions are better than those choices made in the absence of data, the concern was voiced that staff could become confused as to their mission. Are they to focus on serving the youth, or focus on serving the database?

1.7 Continuous Improvement

- *The organization/program continuously examines itself and seeks ways to improve what it does.*

OPP is an organization in transition. Additional leadership and Board renewal within the past year, combined with an ambitious goal for the coming year, is clear evidence of the ongoing process of continuous improvement.

One significant relationship is with the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (EMCF), a grant-making foundation to youth-serving non-profits able to demonstrate and document positive impacts for their clients. Grantees are rigorously evaluated and required to improve documentation, goal-setting and internal systems to better demonstrate impact. OPP has had an ongoing relationship with EMCF, and when the requirements for EMCF funding are compared to the significant activities of OPP, there are distinct parallels including the work of the Bridgespan Group and development of a long-term business plan all aimed at improving the organization in the long term.

One final example of OPP's commitment to improvement can be found in the recent reassignment of a key employee. OPP determined that the Employment/Job Placement of the program needed to be strengthened and moved one of their more experienced Department Heads to oversee this component. The improvement process is in its initial phases, but recognition of the need for improvement, and taking action, point to OPP's culture of improvement.

1.8 Sustainability

- *The organization/program employs a consistent strategy for managing resources effectively and achieving organizational longevity.*

OPP is an excellent example of an organization that manages for today while keeping an eye toward the future. This organization recognized a coming budgetary shortfall at the sunset of the Youth Opportunity funding and replaced the nearly \$1 million of annual funding almost seamlessly. By becoming an exclusively youth program, the organization successfully focused its development efforts on obtaining new funding from a variety of public and private sources. Aiding the staff was the decision to make Youth Pathways its lead programmatic offering.

The Bridgespan Group's work has a significant impact on sustainability as it relates to managing resources. One of the data dashboards was developed to assist administrative staff to understand what population of students required the most resources. Once this dashboard was created, it has helped the organization to make the appropriate allocation decisions.

OPP's next goal related to sustainability is its decision to partner with the Hartford Public Schools to establish an alternative school. This ambitious goal seems to be well along the path of becoming a reality, with the documented support of the Superintendent. Importantly, this new endeavor is consistent with OPP's mission and current programmatic activities as it should improve their students' academic achievement by combining some of their innovative programming with the additional resources offered by the local public schools.

Areas of Strength for Management for Quality Standards

1. Data-based decision-making administratively and programmatically.
2. Board engagement.
3. Constant improvement as a culture.
4. Additional leadership added with the skills needed to meet ambitious goals.

Areas of Growth for Management for Quality Standards

State these as objectives, for example: Expand external staff development opportunities.

1. Supply department level managers with budget reports to help them monitor expenditures.
2. Revise the existing Employee Handbook.
3. Take steps to ensure that ETO documentation is a tool for improvement, not the staff's focus.

Category 2. Programmatic Approach

For each standard in the category, describe in 2-4 paragraphs how the program is addressing the standard. At the end of the section for the category, identify prominent areas of strength and areas for growth for the category as a whole.

2.1 Target Youth

- *The organization/program demonstrates a logical relationship between the youth it serves and the program mission, components and activities.*

OPP's mission is clearly stated, and their program services support that mission. In recent years, OPP has made a concerted effort to focus all of its services on its primary target demographic: youth age 14 to 24. With rare exceptions, such as the high quality child care program, all of their direct services target youth in that age range. Even in

the case of the child care program, youth participating in OPP services are given priority for day care slots. All of their primary and ancillary services support OPP's goals of helping youth become employed or pursue post secondary education.

2.2 Environment & Climate

- *The organization/program offers a safe, structured environment and a climate that promotes and sustains young peoples' development and successful transition to work and adulthood.*

The facilities are comfortable, clean, well-equipped, and clearly serve as a "safe-zone" for participating youth. Both facilities include wall murals the youth had painted, and there was evidence throughout that OPP strives to make their facilities as productive and engaging for youth as possible. Examples included the café-style computer lounge and reading room at the south site, and the youth business classrooms in the north site. OPP has also recently instituted the use of "Value Contracts" in which participants and staff mutually develop and agree to a set of "dos and don'ts" that become the guiding principles for each interaction, both individually and in group settings. The use of Value Contracts is representative of the overall program philosophy.

2.3 Instructional Approach

- *The program uses instructional materials that actively engage youth in their own learning.*

OPP provided several examples of comprehensive assessment tools that suggest their services are tailored to the needs of individuals (e.g., CASAS and Career Scope). Additional evidence that demonstrates the organization's effort to provide tailored services and solicit youth input include: each youth works with their Youth Development Specialist to develop an individual service plan (ISP); the development of Value Contracts (described in 2.2) prior to each individual or group interaction; and an observation of an interaction between a youth and his/her YDS.

To illustrate this competency: a young woman was asked to write a letter to the foster care agency that would be presented at a hearing related to the continuation of foster care services in spite of her aging out of the system. The YDS and youth switched seats and the youth typed the letter with some coaching provided by the YDS. The interaction struck the reviewer as natural and commonplace. It was not staged for the benefit of the reviewer.

Also related to this competency, OPP's Business Development component clearly takes the interests of the participating youth into consideration as curricula are developed. For example, art projects are chosen based on the interests of the youth.

2.4 Collaboration

- *The program leverages resources and services for youth through collaborative relationships.*

OPP's PEPNET application describes many collaborative relationships it has established, including one with the One Stop (in which it operates two programs), the school system, as well as relationships with specific schools and local employers. A good example of successful collaboration is OPP's work with the Hartford school district to develop an alternative school. The nature and intensity of collaborative relationships emerged during discussions with program managers and staff. The reviewer also interviewed a funder that described the collaborative nature of OPP and its significant connections with other agencies and organizations. Several of the leadership and management staff described efforts to further enhance existing collaborations and broker new relationships.

A particularly strong collaboration exists between the Americorps program and the Pathways program. Americorps volunteers tutor young children in the school and appear to assist some of the Pathways youth. OPP also uses Americorps as an opportunity for some of their youth to gain work experience.

2.5 Individual Planning and Guidance

- *The program tailors and guides the program experience for each youth, based on the young person's goals and needs.*

Each youth is assigned a Youth Development Specialist (YDS). The likely compatibility of the YDS and youth is a serious consideration when making assignments. As mentioned in 2.3, OPP uses Individual Service Plans (ISP's) to document goals and action items to achieve said goals. The YDS completes an ISP for each youth in collaboration with the youth. In fact, staff will often wait until a sufficient level of rapport has been developed with the youth prior to completing the ISP to ensure that the youth will significantly contribute to the development of the ISP.

Youth and staff meet periodically to review the ISP and make any adjustments; this finding was supported by management and staff interviews, as well as observations of interactions between the YDS and youth.

OPP works closely with several other systems that serve its clients. As previously mentioned, it operates several programs within the One Stop, providing connections for their other clients. In addition, the reviewer saw evidence of a strong partnership with staff of the foster care system.

2.6 Wrap-Around Support

- *The program helps youth strengthen their assets and meet personal needs beyond academic and career preparation.*

OPP operates a comprehensive set of ancillary services to support the efforts of participants. Referrals for such services are regularly made as evidenced by discussions with management, staff, and youth participants. When OPP doesn't have services to meet a need, staff will refer to other agencies or organizations. Reviewer interactions with program staff and youth suggest that OPP takes a "strength-based" approach in its work with clients, trying to identify and celebrate strengths, and provide supports to remediate deficits.

2.7 Youth Engagement

- *The program engages youth as active, respected contributors to the program and the community.*

OPP's work with the PEPNET self assessment identified youth engagement as an area for improvement OPP has implemented several efforts, suggesting they have significantly improved efforts around youth engagement. In fact, the reviewers felt this was a particular strength of the program. Evidence included:

- OPP engaged youth and staff in a discussion to make the ISP more "youth-friendly." The document is now much shorter and more accessible.
- There has been an effort to engage youth in programming and provide them with a more useful experience.
- As mentioned earlier, the ISP is not completed until rapport has been developed between the YDS and the youth to ensure maximum contribution from the youth.
- The formation of a youth advisory/leadership board.
- During several staff interviews, staff expressed that their job was to empower youth to learn how to navigate systems and to be successful on their own.

2.8 Employer Engagement

- *The program actively engages public and private sector employers to strengthen program activities.*

Employer engagement is an area that OPP is shoring up, and one that is a primary focus of the Director of Strategic Implementation. He mentioned that this was the first time in a long time where there were more employers and slots for work experiences than available youth to fill those slots, suggesting that employers have been successfully engaged by OPP. YDS's provide some job coaching, if necessary. Job development is a focus of the program. The job development staff were sent to "job developer boot camp," demonstrating the importance OPP has put on this component, and their willingness to invest resources to maximize its value to participants.

2.9 Transition Support

- *The program helps youth make a gradual transition from full program participation to independent engagement in positive activities.*

Transition support is both a strength and an area of development for the program. It is clear that youth are well supported as they transition out of youth services into post-secondary education or employment as evidenced by discussions with program staff and youth. There is a clear plan that positions the youth to successfully complete the program, and there are numerous connections to other agencies and organizations to help support the transition. However, the reviewers noted that there was some reluctance by both staff and youth to "let go." Management recognize this as an issue and have been working to develop a more clearly-articulated plan for youth to transition from active to follow-along status. This will open up program slots so that additional youth could benefit from program services.

Areas of Strength for Programmatic Approach

1. A high level of youth engagement was evidenced throughout the review visit. There was also a significant level of rapport between staff and youth.
2. The use of Value Contracts reinforces the youth engagement piece.
3. The use of Americorps is evidence of a particularly strong collaboration that benefits OPP, Americorps, and most importantly the youth.

Areas of Growth for Programmatic Approach

State these as objectives, for example: Develop transition structures to support your participants who enter post-secondary education.

Develop a more clearly defined exit plan for youth that specifies when they should be transitioned from active status to follow-along status.

Category 3. Youth Development Competencies

For each standard in the category, describe in 2-4 paragraphs how the program is addressing the standard. At the end of the section for the category, identify prominent areas of strength and areas for growth for the category as a whole.

3.1 Working

- *The program, on its own or through collaborative partnerships, helps youth develop competencies important to becoming a productive member of the workforce and achieving economic self-sufficiency.*

The OPP program provides excellent exposure for participants as it provides a wide range of experiences to young people in multiple facets of the World of Work. This can be seen in its job readiness activities, exposure to careers via career exploration activities, work experience and internships, part-time jobs, employer workshops and presentations, Americorps placements, job shadowing and ongoing discussion and observation of life in a community of positive workers. All participants create Real & Dream Resumes designed to focus participants on goal-setting as well as educational and vocational skills needed to reach their chosen careers.

Many participants are placed in year-round, part-time, summer and short-term jobs. Some are paid by the employers and many are paid by OPP. Activities are not age and skill-appropriate. The site's Youth Biz program provides a forum for youth interested in entrepreneurships. This program enables participants to ascertain via firsthand experience the process of developing, managing, working in and the challenges of owning a business. Designated staff members who actively provide oversight, case management and family support if necessary for participants that are engaged in this activity guide this program.

A number of participants are engaged in the NOT JUST BOATS Program, a career-focused, work-based learning activity program involving boat building, furniture building and repair and drum design. The project introduces vocational skills useful in the Connecticut area. It integrates math, reading and science competencies that pertain to communication, dealing with supervision and other interpersonal skills. Participants are paid for this activity.

A number of OPP participants are enrolled in the Americorps program after they complete major portions of the Passport Program. This program enables them to earn funds, complete their education and gain useful skills applicable to future work goals. Youth in this program are generally focused on career choices and completing their educational goals. Youth observed communicated well and were able to articulate their future goals, supportive service needs and the activities that will enable them to reach their employability goals. The fact that OPP's program, staff members and CEO have had a positive impact on these participants' lives, growth and development has resulted in an overwhelming commitment that each Americorps enrollee wants to eventually work for OPP.

3.2 Academic Learning

- *The program, on its own or through collaborative partnerships, helps youth develop competencies important to academic achievement.*

OPP utilizes the Read 180 Scholastic Achievement Manager to facilitate growth and development in all participants. The academic team suggested that approximately 95 % of all participants show growth in Comprehension, Fluency, Vocabulary and spelling. The SCANS and EFF skills are integrated into the building of Academic skills to provide a link between work and learning.

Participants are engaged in applied learning activities in all core components and activities. The CASAS test is used to assess and measure skills levels. Learning

styles are monitored to maximize potential growth and development in all academic and social levels.

Academic learning has developed a series of activities in the following areas that are tracked to document progress. These include but are not limited to:

- Basic Skills – Youth learn budgeting, develop narrative and utilize work-based learning activities to strengthen skills sets;
- Customer Service – Youth learn skills and acquire certifications that enhance their ability to interact effectively with groups and individuals;
- Computer Literacy – Youth use computers to develop resumes, conduct research and prepare materials that can be disseminated to the public;
- Communication– Youth learn verbal and written skills
- Career Plan Assessment and Development - All participants develop a career plan.

Participants are encouraged to complete high school and or enroll in GED classes. OPP is developing a high school that will be modeled after the Good Shepherd High School in South Brooklyn, NY. An online High School, the Penn Foster High School will host 45 youth. OPP has developed a number of linkages with area community colleges, including Trinity College, the Universities of Hartford and Connecticut and Americorps to facilitate participant enrollment, financial support and transition into college.

3.3 Connecting

- *The program, on its own or through collaborative partnerships, helps youth develop competencies important to establishing positive social relationships.*

OPP's staff and management team are exceptional role models, mentors and examples of positive citizens and workers. The culture of the agency is one of positive reinforcement for not only the participants but family members as well. This is exhibited by the participants' long tenure of involvement in the program from Youth Opportunity to Americorps and the positive and continual guided growth for youth. Participants are engaged in community service activities, special projects and work. They resolve challenges and return to participate in other activities with goals for the future. Youth are engaged in programs designed to focus on education and work. Youth are provided part-time work, full-time work during summers, internships and/or paid in tiers for activities by age group.

Family support (mothers and grandparents) was also shown to be in evidence, as when family members discuss youth experiencing problems in school, with the law, work and a return to school or entry into college. These parents and youth demonstrated the positive impact of this program on the community.

It should be noted that most participants interviewed felt the program should be expanded and expressed a desire to return and/or work at OPP. Most said they "would never leave OPP."

3.4 Leading

- *The program, on its own or through collaborative partnerships, helps youth develop competencies important to personal responsibility and civic leadership.*

Participants are engaged in community service activities because of the wide range of activities that OPP engages them in and because of Hartford's mandated community service requirement for middle and high schools. OPP engages youth in activities that support National public service days such as National Youth Service Day, Make a Difference Day and Job Shadowing Day. Youth serve as volunteers and paid interns at OPP and learn to communicate orally as a part of the applied academic activities. Older youth are enrolled in Americorps to support supportive services needs and educational growth and development.

All OPP programs are designed to provide services and activities that enhance not only the young person but also the community. NOT Just Boats was recently spotlighted in National Geography for its efforts to preserve snapping turtles in the Hartford Parks. The group also builds and donates furniture to appropriate agencies and individuals.

3.5 Thriving

- *The program, on its own or through collaborative partnerships, helps youth develop competencies necessary for optimal physical and emotional well-being.*

OPP has been successful in its effort to develop a quality program that supports the strengths, goals and development of the young people of the Hartford Community. Staff demonstrate energy and are committed to developing well rounded, educated and focused youth who will become positive citizens in the Hartford and global community. This appears to be a common thread throughout the organization: All young people interviewed articulated that, although many Youth Development Specialists had left the agency, they were replaced with other individuals who were supportive, strong mentors responsive to them and their families.

Areas of Strength for Youth Development Competencies

1. The program provides opportunities for youth to develop competencies for securing employment.
2. The program communicates and develops positive relationships with youth.

3. The program adapts, facilitates and evaluates age appropriate activities with and for the group.
4. The program involves employers and youth.
5. The program cares for, involves and works with families and communities.
6. The program works as a team and shows professionalism.
7. The program provides support that enhances asset building.

Areas of Growth for Youth Development Competencies

State these as objectives, for example: Foster more involvement with caring adults, including family members as appropriate.

The program should develop a process that fosters a smooth transition from OPP.

Category 4 Focus on Youth Results

Describe in 2-4 paragraphs how the program is addressing each outcome or progress measure it measures. At the end of the section for the category, identify prominent areas of strength and areas for growth for the category as a whole.

4.1 Working Outcomes

- *The program measures and demonstrates outcomes related to participants' work readiness and employment status.*

OPP's focus on information-gathering and use of the ETO software is well documented under section 1. The data entered into the system by front line staff is aggregated and placed on a Program Metrics Report produced monthly as well as the more detailed OPP Monthly Indicator Checklist. Both are examples of the Program Dashboards recommended for OPP's use by the Bridgespan Group and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

- Under the Core Business/Employment heading:
 - Obtained job during period (FT-PT)
 - Unsubsidized Employment
 - Unsubsidized Employment Retention
 - Subsidized Employment or Internship

OPP tracks participants referred/enrolled/completed in the following activities on the Monthly Indicator Checklist for Pathways Youth and JFES:

- Job Readiness Training
- Occupational Skills Training
- Internship

Additionally, OPP tracks placement and job retention by industry for Pathways and WIA-JAFES youth. Given the emphasis on data entry and usage the reported outcomes of 60% Work Readiness Credential Attainment, 89% Job Placement (Unsubsidized) and 81% Retention Rate is viewed as accurate and compares favorably to other youth programs.

4.2 Academic Learning Outcomes

- *The program measures and demonstrates outcomes related to participants' academic achievement.*

OPP uses the same reporting tools for this area of student activity.

OPP tracks participant activity in the following categories on the Program Metrics Report:

- Under the Core Business/Education heading:
 - Out of School Youth (OSY) returned to School
 - High School Diploma/ Equivalent
 - Attending Higher Ed/Vocational Education
 - Youth Completed Higher Ed/Vocational Certification
- OPP tracks participants New Enrollment/Still Attending/Completion in the following activities on the Monthly Indicator Checklist for Pathways Youth:
 - 4 Year College
 - 2 Year College
 - Vocational Certification Program

The Monthly Indicator Checklist also tracks High School Diploma attainment, school re-enrollment, and number of students promoted (particularly 9th and 10th grades) along tracking that targets skill improvement without certification according to CASAS and other standardized testing tools.

- For OPP's JFES youth, the measurements are similar except that they measure Post Secondary New Enrollment/Still Attending/Completion rather than 2 or 4 Year College Enrollment.

One definitional issue arose during the visit when OPP staff stated that educational graduation rate was the percentage of those attaining academic credentials versus those within one year of being able to attain those credentials. For example, only those who enter their final year of high school are counted against the final number of graduates. PEPNet reviewers have suggested that they alter this formula to include all

youth who enroll in an educational or vocational course of study versus all completers to be consistent with WIA formulation of graduation rates.

4.3 Productive Engagement Outcomes

- *The program demonstrates the degree to which youth participants are productively engaged in society.*

OPP captures relevant and related information under other PEPNet standards.

4.4 Program Specific Outcomes

- *The program demonstrates other outcomes essential to the youth served and program offerings.*

OPP uses the Program Metrics Report to track the number of youth engaged in various pro-social activities in addition to student engagement in education and employment services. Examples include:

- The number of youth impacted by Americorps members
- Those involved in Global Youth Service Day
- Those OPP youth and other youth involved with Peacebuilders

4.5 – 4.7 Appropriate Progress Measures

- *The program measures and demonstrates that youth are making progress toward achieving outcomes or competencies appropriate to their needs and the program's mission.*

While the Program Metrics and the Indicator Checklist dashboards track goal attainment, ETO tracks interim progress of students toward the overall goals. For instance, the ETO summary report for Employment Services tracks the number of students engaged in components of the employment program such as Resume Development, Job Search, Interviewing Interpersonal Skills and Dress for Success to mention a few.

Achievement or participation in the program segments are tracked per staff and noted on the student's individual files.

Areas of Strength for Focus on Youth Results

OPP has created a culture of decisions based on data regarding youth progress. They know their mission is better served if students excel in school and become part of the workforce. It is these measures on which they have chosen to concentrate. Outcomes related to school are appropriate for the youth as are those related to employment. More importantly, management uses these results to make organizational decisions.

The obvious specific strength is that the information-gathering apparatus is in place at OPP and the reports that are generated from this information. Where the Program Metrics Report gives a snapshot of performance in overall terms, the Indicator Checklist provides more detailed information. Lastly, interim achievement is documented in ETO by front line staff and monitored by supervisors.

Areas of Growth for Focus on Youth Results

State these as objectives, for example: Determine and use progress measures for academic learning.

OPP should evaluate the formulas used to create outcome data and change those which are inconsistent with Workforce Investment Act formulas. The graduation rate is the first example.

OPP measures Occupational Skills attainment; however, the credentials that are offered are internal in nature and not industry or DOL recognized. OPP should explore the feasibility of offering industry or DOL-recognized credentials.

Synthesis of Program Strengths and Critical Areas for Follow-up

Areas for Commendation

Condense from the areas of strength for the categories and list not more than 8.

1. *Evidence of engagement across all levels of the organization.* The Board is highly engaged in the activities of OPP. Youth are highly engaged in program services. Program staff are engaged in the mission, work as a team, and demonstrate a high level of professionalism. The use of Value Contracts reinforces this multi-layered engagement.
2. *Data-driven culture with a focus on continuous improvement.* There was strong evidence of data based decision making both administratively and programmatically. OPP has developed systems to use data to address multiple facets of service delivery. For example, the Program Metrics Report gives a snapshot of performance in overall terms, the Indicator Checklist provides more detailed information, and interim achievement is documented in ETO by front line staff and monitored by supervisors. Further supporting the culture of continuous improvement is the fact that OPP recognized the need to add additional leadership who had the necessary skills to meet ambitious goals.

3. *Comprehensive, holistic approach to service delivery.* For example, OPP involves and employs youth and cares for, involves and works with families and communities.
4. *Strong collaborative relationships.* The use of Americorps is evidence of a particularly strong collaboration that benefits OPP, Americorps, and most importantly the youth. In addition, OPP's work with the Hartford School District to develop an alternative school provides further evidence of this competency.
5. *Strong program components and features.* For example, OPP provides opportunities for youth to develop competencies for securing employment and provides supports that enhance asset building. In addition, OPP adapts, facilitates and evaluates age appropriate activities with and for the group.

Critical Areas for Follow-up

This section will influence the program's action planning. Condense from the areas of growth for the categories and list not more than 8.

1. Supply department level managers with budget reports to help them monitor expenditures.
2. Revise the existing Employee Handbook.
3. Take steps to ensure that ETO documentation is a tool for improvement, not the staff's focus.
4. Develop a more clearly defined exit plan for youth that specifies when they should be transitioned from "active" status to "follow-along" status.
5. OPP should evaluate the formulas used to create outcome data and change those which are inconsistent with Workforce Investment Act formulas. The graduation rate is the first example.
6. OPP measures Occupational Skills attainment; however, the credentials that are offered are internal in nature and not industry or DOL-recognized. OPP should explore the feasibility of offering industry or DOL-recognized credentials.

CHAPTER V. POSSIBLE QUALITY PRACTICES

Briefly describe any practices or strategies NYEC should consider for inclusion in the online Index to Quality Practices. The description should be sufficient to identify and discuss the practice or strategy, but does not have to be overly detailed, as NYEC staff will contact the program for more and specific information.

1. The use of Value Contracts appears to be a particularly useful tool for promoting youth and staff engagement and development. Its use encourages everyone

involved to be mutually responsible for creating a "safe" environment that promotes a high level of accountability and participation.

2. A high level of Board engagement and board driven change has been extremely beneficial to OPP. OPP has made a concerted effort to have the board be very involved in (and therefore invested in) the organization and the changes that are being made. The creation of Board subcommittees is evidence of that. This strikes the review team as a quality practice that could be replicated.