

Developing Future Leaders Through The Fund For Children

Libby Walsh O'Donnell & Philip Fitzgerald 19 June 2014

The Philadelphia Foundation places a high value on cultivating the youth voice in both word and in deed. It is no secret that too many youth in Philadelphia struggle with the stresses of poverty, violence and self-worth. The Fund for Children (FFC) of The Philadelphia Foundation (TPF) supports opportunities for youth to be their own catalysts for change.

In response to a funding gap for youth-led programs, the FFC puts its focus on nonprofits that allow the young people who are being served to guide and shape the design of programs for youth. The FFC's three programs include Strategic Investment in Youth (which supports activities for older youth, including community service projects, job readiness and life skills training), the Supporting Grants Program (which provides small grants for short-term needs of nonprofits serving youth), and YOUTHadelphia, a youth philanthropy program.

YOUTHadelphia serves as a model for nonprofits seeking to incorporate teen perspective into program development. Through YOUTHadelphia, Philadelphia

teens are tasked with defining issue areas and deciding on grants that create change for their peers. They select issue areas by interviewing community members, classmates, and neighbors.

Many young people, both in and out of the YOUTHadelphia program, are facing extreme challenges. Almost 62% of Philadelphians under 18 years-old live in single-parent homes and 36% live below the poverty line — over twice the percentage for the entire state of Pennsylvania. The school district distributes free or reduced priced meals to 77% of the students it serves. The 2012 graduation rate for the Philadelphia School District was 66% , compared to Pennsylvania's graduation rate of 84%.

Over the past ten years, The Philadelphia Foundation's Fund for Children has invested in youth-serving programs that address many of these quality of life issues. The Fund was established specifically to serve Philadelphia's children with 30-year commitments from two of Philadelphia's major sports teams, the Eagles and the Phillies, through a lease arrangement with the City of Philadelphia.

Annually, the Fund for Children distributes \$1 million to Philadelphia-based nonprofit organizations that engage youth and develop future leaders. An additional \$1 million is placed in a permanently-restricted endowment to ensure that the Fund for Children will improve the quality

of life for the children of Philadelphia in perpetuity.

Of the \$1 million granted annually, \$100,000 is distributed through YOUTHadelphia. As a part of the the program, Philadelphia teens learn about leadership, philanthropy, and civic engagement.

Young people in Philadelphia are more often than not on the receiving end of philanthropic dollars. Many receive services from community-based organizations that help them build skills to traverse into adulthood. Very few of these young people are able to experience what it means to be a "grantmaker." In the region, The Chester County Fund for Women and Girls has its own teen Philanthropy program, the Girls Advisory Board, but it is limited to girls from Chester County.

YOUTHadelphia makes philanthropy accessible to those young people in Philadelphia County who otherwise may not have the opportunity to give back to their communities. The YOUTHadelphia participants make decisions that directly affect programs offered to their peers: the hundreds of thousands of youth who live in Philadelphia and those who receive services through nonprofits that get grants through the two other Fund for Children programs.

In 2011, ten years after the fund was established, The Philadelphia Foundation hired an outside firm to assess the effectiveness of its strategy. The evaluation,

conducted by Rainbow Research, Inc. resulted in a 2012 report entitled *Youth Engagement: An Evaluation of The Philadelphia Foundation's Fund for Children*. The research included interviews and focus groups, including groups made up of and facilitated by out-of-school-time program participants.

In the report, the surveyed youth discussed acquiring coping skills that have helped them manage everyday stress. Some programs provide direct academic tutoring and opportunities to refine computer skills. One young person said he had learned how to use PowerPoint and other Microsoft programs, as well as how to be better organized. Another talked about learning "responsibility [and] dependability."

When programs offered tutoring and homework help, the tangible benefits to participants were higher test scores and improved grades. Youth also appeared to develop a stronger future orientation and a better understanding of the importance of college. "It's made me think about everything that's out there waiting for us after high school," one teen said. "You've just got to reach out and grab it..."

YOUTHadelphia, like many other out-of-school time programs in Philadelphia, seeks to provide teens with the skills necessary to "reach out and grab" opportunities to be successful. The Rainbow Research report explains the benefits this type of programming affords. Youth-led

programs build development of leadership, teamwork, and strategic skills; the ability to communicate effectively; an application of new skill sets to daily life; growth of multicultural competency; and quality and caring relationships.

Young people in YOUTHadelphia are tasked with recommending funding for programs that successfully teach these skills. As part of their philanthropic process, the youth set grantmaking priorities, design an application, host a Request for Proposal release event, review applications, conduct site visits, and make final grant recommendations. Since 2006, YOUTHadelphia has made 60 grants totaling \$595,705 to 42 organizations.

During YOUTHadelphia's recruitment period, returning committee members review new member applications, conduct interviews, and determine who will be a good fit for committee membership. Once the full committee is established, the youth are separated into cohorts.

Returning members become cohort leaders responsible for conducting 'check-in' calls with new members after meetings, leading discussions during meetings, and acting as liaisons between their cohort and the adult advisors.

All youth participants can volunteer to be site-visit leaders. The site-visit leaders manage the process including organizing calls with other YOUTHadelphia members to discuss the application, questions, and

logistics. As they review applications, YOUTHadelphia members look to see if the same level of youth leadership that they experience in YOUTHadelphia exists in the programs they are considering for support.

Each year, the adult advisors and YOUTHadelphians think of new ways members can be leaders. The young people understand they share responsibility for the success of the program because so many decisions are in their hands. This sense of ownership of the program affirms their commitment to both YOUTHadelphia and to making impactful grants.

Just as YOUTHadelphians have gained valuable knowledge of their city, their peers, and themselves, the programs funded through the two other Fund for Children programs have helped shape youth who are future-oriented and equipped with life experiences outside their communities. Through its grantmaking, The Philadelphia Foundation continues to promote the message of youth empowerment in every neighborhood in the city. The resulting impact of these investments reverbrates throughout the region and beyond.

In the words of one YOUTHadelphia member, "Everyone has a say, everyone's opinion matters, everyone can be a leader."

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Resources

U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

***<http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/about/#schools>
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***Philadelphia Public School Notebook, April 2013, Vol.
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***Chester County Fund for Women and Girls website,
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***Youth Engagement: An Evaluation of the Philadelphia
Foundation's Fund for Children, Rainbow Research,
Inc***