

City of Camden
Mayor's Transition Team
Youth Development Committee
Recommendations Report
DRAFT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY : 1/4/10

Executive Summary

According to the 2000 census, 35% of Camden's population is under the age of 18. The figures clearly reveal the significance of the youth population of our City. One of the key goals of our new Mayor is to develop programs and services to enhance the lives of the future of our City – our youth. As a part of the transition of Mayoral authority, a Youth Development subcommittee was developed to develop recommendations in the area of youth services. The development of our youth is critical for our present and future. It is our goal to present recommendations which have the greatest positive impact on our youth and the City. With this in mind, our recommendations are based on long-term effective programs that provide growth, inspiration and hope for all youth of the City regardless of background or skill levels.

The purpose of this draft executive summary is to discuss the preliminary work of the subcommittee along with a presentation of the recommendations currently being researched in the area of youth development. It is the belief of the subcommittee, that the final document will clearly present each recommendation with a full description of plans for implementation and continued enhancement.

Per the recommendations of John Kromer, Fixing Broken Cities: The Implementation of Urban Development Strategies:

“The best possible time to address these issues is during the period between December 1, 2009 and June 30, 2010...which it would be most advantageous for incoming elected officials to try to implement new initiatives.”

The following are recommendations, based on the initial charge of the subcommittee, for the first 100 days, within the first 9 months and over 2 years.

First 100 Days:

RECOMMENDATION: RE-EVALUATE AND UTILIZE THE MAYORAL YOUTH COUNCIL TO BETTER SUPPORT THE VISION OF THE MAYOR FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

In order to develop effective programs, services and models it is essential that the Mayor seek advice and input from the youth of our City. Youth Development is one of the top priorities of the new Mayor and therefore the youth must be involved in the creation of programs and services. The Youth Council should include youth from various aspects, backgrounds and neighborhoods and serve as an effective and influential team of advisers to the Mayor.

RECOMMENDATION: CONDUCT AN INVENTORY OF VARIOUS CAMDEN CITY YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS BY NEIGHBORHOOD.

Upon our initial review and discussions with various City partners, it is very clear that there a great deal of youth services and programs currently underway in various neighborhoods. However, there are some neighborhoods where there is a lack of adequate services for the youth. In addition, there does not appear to be any evidence of coordination on behalf of the City government in reference to the various programs or lack thereof in the various neighborhoods. In order to provide the highest quality of youth development services each neighborhood must have access to such programs and the City must establish processes to monitor and evaluate existing programs and lead the efforts to develop new meaningful youth services.

RECOMMENDATION: FACILITATE A FORUM WITH EDUCATIONAL PARTNERS IN THE CITY OF CAMDEN TO DISCUSS AND PLAN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

Within the City of Camden is a wealth of educational resources. Camden City is the home of many k-12 public, private and charter schools. In addition, Camden is the home to three major well known institutions of higher education – Camden County College, Rowan University and Rutgers-Camden. Through our initial discussions with k-12 officials, there is a willingness to partner for the development of youth services and programs beyond the traditional school day. After meeting with key individuals from the three higher education institutions it is evident that the institutions are very involved in the City of Camden on many different levels ranging from early childhood to post-secondary and graduate education. It is also clear that each institution has the ability to provide a great deal of expertise, research capabilities and professional services to the Mayor and the City in the area of youth development. A preliminary recommendation of the subcommittee is for the Mayor to convene a regular forum with the leaders of the various k-12 schools and higher education institutions to discuss ways the institutions and the City can partner for youth development services.

RECOMMENDATION: ENGAGE FAITH-BASED LEADERS IN THE DISCUSSION OF PROGRAMMING AND UTILIZE CHURCHES AS YOUTH PROGRAM LOCATIONS

One of the key institutions linked to youth and families in the City neighborhoods are the churches and faith-based organizations. The organizations often provide support, assistance and guidance to the youth of the City on a regular basis. Many of the faith-based groups are currently involved in youth development programs. There are many who desire to increase their programs but have a limited amount of resources. In addition, the church and faith-based organizations are viewed as “safe havens” and comfortable settings for many of our families in the City. The leaders of the various faiths in the City can be instrumental in the creation and

implementation of youth development programs. In addition, since many of the families are well connected with religious organizations, it would be beneficial for many of the youth development programs and services to also occur in some of our neighbor churches and faith-based organizations as a way to add more programs in the local neighborhoods in facilities which are familiar and currently being used by the communities.

RECOMMENDATION-100 DAY YOUTH EVENT

In recognition of the importance of youth development, the subcommittee recommends that the Mayor hold a large-scale, youth event in the City of Camden at a major venue such as the Susquehanna Center. The event should include all schools whether public, private or charter and should try to accomplish several tasks including: honoring outstanding academic achievement, highlight ways youth can be involved in community projects, motivate youth to achieve and provide activities and events to engage youth physically, mentally and emotionally.

RECOMMENDATION -LAUNCH CAMDEN YOUTH JOBS AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Organize and launch job opportunities for Camden's youth. Announce the opportunities at the Mayor's Youth 100 day event for the summer of 2010 and find opportunities to continue employment offerings year-round. A statement from Mr. Kelly Johnson of William Penn Foundation provides the best summary of the purpose of this recommendation, "Camden needs a solid youth workforce development system. This is vastly different than a youth employment system that is merely focused on connecting youth with jobs. A workforce development system has an eye towards building a pipeline of workers to stabilize the city in the long run."

FIRST NINE MONTHS:

RECOMMENDATION: EXPAND PARTNERSHIPS WITH CORPORATIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Various major corporations have decided to become involved in the City as a way to encourage new and enhanced programs for youth. Upon speaking with several representatives, it was clear that outside funders are still very much interested in providing financial support to the creation of youth and educational programs. However, there was much concern by corporations indicating a desire to see more coordination of youth services throughout the City

as a way to engage funders in programs that are comprehensive and extensive and collaborations between various entities in the City for youth development. The subcommittee strongly urges the new Mayor to examine existing support by Camden City major corporations. Also develop clear strategies to engage the corporate leaders at various levels in order to ensure of their support.

RECOMMENDATION -PREPARE SITES AND LAUNCH PROGRAMS WITH SEPTEMBER BACK TO SCHOOL TIME:

The first nine months of work on youth development should make it possible to begin the 2010-2011 school-year with new opportunities for our youth. Over the course of the first nine months, the Mayor and staff should meet with key educational leaders, faith-based leaders and community agencies to discuss the utilization of venues for the various proposed after-school, after-dinner, evening and weekend youth activities and to ensure that there are programs in every neighborhood of value and substance to attract and benefit the youth.

FOR THE NEXT TWO YEARS

RECOMMENDATION – IMPLEMENT MEASURES TO REVIEW NEW AND CONTINUED YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

An audit of the various youth development services by the Office of the Mayor would provide for a comprehensive review of youth related activities for the City. Some aspects of the review should include the following:

- Identification of current Youth Development organizations
- Review the mission and purpose of organization
- Review of data pertaining to the effect of services provided
- Study the location of the service in respect to the neighborhood

It is our belief that this recommendation is one that should be on-going throughout the term of the Mayor and established as a permanent act of the Office of the Mayor in order to assure sound and quality youth programs for the children and youth of the City of Camden.

RECOMMENDATION -FIRST MONITORING REPORT

We strongly recommend that this Mayor use factual data to see where trends are improving or declining in the area of youth, youth services and programs. We hope the report will clearly show a correlation to improved crime rates, improved graduation rates, improved employment

and also show where the gaps are by area, by afterschool activities, and after dinner activities for our youth. Two years should be recognized as a short timeframe for this type of work, however, there is also great value and truth of the intention of the efforts to begin the process and then sustain it. The report should be externally prepared and presented to the Mayor, the Camden City Mayor's Youth Council, school administrators, and other key stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATION: RESTRUCTURE OF DEPARTMENTS TO ENHANCE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

The municipal system should be restructured to create a Parks and Recreation Division for the City of Camden by combining resources of the current Department of Public Works Parks Department and the Division of Health and Human Services.

RECOMMENDATION: CONTINUED EVALUATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS PRESENTED IN EACH CATEGORY TO ENSURE EFFECTIVENESS, GROWTH AND ENHANCEMENT

It is important to recognize that this draft is based on an expedited mayoral transition exercise. The knowledge of those that give their time and talent to our youth in Camden in what has been quiet and passionate work has barely been tapped to create this report. We are confident that Mayor Redd will highlight all of the positive work and continually search for feedback from the experts in the field and those involved on a daily basis that are helping our City's youth.

It is our goal to continue our work as we finalize our youth development report. In addition, we pledge our support as a team to work with Mayor Redd and her cabinet to continue to examine, develop and create youth development programs and services for our youth and our City.

Respectfully submitted,

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