CREATING A YOUTH SERVICES COLLABORATIVE
IN SAVANNAH, GA. (A)

Introduction: A Program At The Crossroads

Otis Johnson and Don Mendonsa were discouraged. As they packed up to leave the summer 1990 retreat of Savannah’s Youth Futures Authority (YFA), Johnson, the executive director and Mendonsa, a board member of the Authority’s Oversight Collaborative, were troubled by the latest data on at-risk youth served by YFA programs. Despite the intense, groundbreaking two-year campaign waged by business leaders, educators, and social service advocates to expand and coordinate the services provided to Savannah’s youth, few lasting improvements in the lives of these children and their families had been realized. They agreed that this ambitious initiative was at a crossroads, as they were now up against a looming deadline for development of a second phase plan for the YFA. Approval of this plan by the project sponsor — the Annie E. Casey Foundation — was critical if the Collaborative was going to continue to work toward major social services reform.

Savannah’s Children: A Community Concern

In 1986, the city of Savannah was beginning to reap the benefits of three decades of urban renewal that had revitalized the city’s historic downtown neighborhood. Suburban professionals were being lured back downtown by an urban homesteading program that allowed them to buy run-down, historic homes for a pittance, if they agreed to renovate the dwellings. By the mid nineteen-eighties, hundreds of homes had been restored, and Savannah could once again boast of elegant mansions and lush city parks. A growing tourism trade began to draw money back into the city. On the surface, Savannah seemed poised to enjoy a renaissance.

Beneath this veneer, however, long-standing social and economic problems were straining the city’s resources and threatening Savannah’s nascent tourist trade. Crime, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, and school dropouts were all on the rise — primarily, although not exclusively — in Savannah’s poor black neighborhoods. Savannah’s city manager,
Don Mendonsa, worried about the effect these problems, particularly crime, were having on the city in social and economic terms: “By not addressing these social problems, we were paying more in the long-run: more for jails, more for welfare programs, and more for health problems.”

With a background in urban planning, Mendonsa was known in Savannah for being analytic and meticulous when faced with complex issues. He began to study Savannah’s crime problem and found that several factors were contributing, or related, to the crime rate, particularly school dropout rates. Approximately 20% of all middle and high school students were failing school each year. School failure was worst among Savannah’s black population: 34% of all blacks did not go beyond eighth grade, and 57% did not graduate from high school. Every year, both graduates and dropouts joined an ever-growing pool of unemployed young adults. The unemployment rate for white youth ages 16-19 was high (15%), for black youth, it was worse: 25.5%.¹

Mendonsa concluded that a large percentage of Savannah’s students were leaving school barely literate and lacking the basic skills needed to compete in the local job market, and that the Savannah community would continue to be plagued by crime and unemployment until the city did a better job of educating students: “If we were going to get a grip on crime, we had to get a handle on these school performance problems.”

Emerging Leadership

In October 1986, Mendonsa brought his concerns about Savannah’s youth and the city’s economic well being to City Council members. He noted that although many groups and institutions were providing social and health services to children in Savannah, there was little effort to assess children’s problems on a community-wide basis, little coordination of services, and few attempts to measure the effectiveness of current programs. Council members were stunned by Mendonsa’s data, and he followed up his speech with presentations to community civic groups, African-American church leaders, and other professional and volunteer groups involved or interested in children’s problems and the services provided to address them. Mendonsa’s cage rattling caught the attention of the local press and made community leaders understand the relationship between the city’s economic vitality and the educational and social problems plaguing the city’s underprivileged youth.

One business leader struck by Mendonsa’s message was Jim Piette, then vice president of Union Camp Corporation, a pulp and paper mill, one of the Savannah’s largest employers. Piette had been quietly concerned about the problems of Savannah’s youth for some time. “Since 1971, I had been living in Savannah and had noticed a disturbing trend. Many of the young men from Savannah’s public school system who applied for jobs at Union Camp couldn’t pass the mill’s basic competency test. I didn’t want us to hire a lot of out-of-towners, but we had no choice.” He felt that now was the time for city leaders to invest
in the public school system; the long-term consequences for the local labor supply would be dire if action wasn’t taken soon.

Mendonsa’s speech and his emphasis on underlying causes also struck a chord in city council member Otis Johnson. A Savannah native, Johnson was an outspoken activist from Savannah’s African-American community, and a professor of sociology at Savannah State College. Johnson represented one of Savannah’s poorest neighborhoods, predominantly African-American, the place where he had grown up. A familiar presence at community meetings and public hearings, Johnson was not afraid to challenge public officials on policies affecting Savannah’s black community.

**Children’s Needs Gain National Attention**

While leaders in Savannah like Mendonsa and Johnson were trying to increase the community’s awareness of the condition of Savannah’s at-risk children, the Annie E. Casey Foundation was getting ready to launch its “New Futures Initiative” in selected cities. The goal of the initiative was to help more at-risk youth become productive adults by preventing them from dropping out of school, becoming teen parents, or remaining chronically unemployed. The Foundation’s strategy for reaching this goal was to encourage and support reform in community institutions serving at-risk children. If the prospects of at-risk children were to improve, all of the youth-serving agencies in a community needed to work together instead of planning services in isolation from each other. The Foundation thought that the public schools, of all institutions, had the greatest effect on children’s likelihood of failure or success. The Foundation also thought that efforts should target middle school students, rather than high school students with established failure patterns.

To encourage and support institutional reform and collaboration, the Casey Foundation would provide selected cities matching grants of between five and twelve million dollars over a five-year period to restructure services to at-risk children. The Foundation sought mid-sized cities in which there was significant income disparity between the black and white communities. They also looked for cities where there was some history of collaboration among institutions serving children, and a willingness, capacity, and commitment to improve and reform children’s services.

In Savannah, the local United Way, Chamber of Commerce, the Chatham-Savannah School District, social service agencies, and child advocates had worked together since the 1970’s on various projects, task forces, and advisory councils with the aim of improving the prospects of Savannah’s poorest children. Impressed by Savannah’s spirit of revitalization and by its history of collaboration, the Casey Foundation invited Savannah to submit a New Futures proposal in the summer of 1987. The offer included a $20,000 planning grant to support the proposal development process.

**The Planning Scramble**
Don Mendonsa was given the responsibility for developing Savannah’s proposal by the January 1988 deadline. To develop Savannah’s proposal, Mendonsa followed the Foundation’s planning guide (Attachment 1). Cities were asked to document the status of at-risk children and to outline local strategies which would be used to reduce the number of students from dropping out of school, decrease the number of teen pregnancies, and improve employment prospects for students after high school.

After consulting with the local United Way’s board and staff, Mendonsa invited fifty people from a wide range of public and private social service agencies to help develop the city’s initiative proposal, and Jim Piette agreed to chair the planning council. Piette’s stature in Savannah’s business community lent credibility to the project and helped attract Bill Sprague, president one of Savannah’s biggest employers, Savannah Foods and Industries, to the planning council.

Since the initiative would target school students, the Chatham-Savannah School District superintendent thought that the school district should lead the planning process; however, other participants thought that the lead agency should be independent of the school district. Tensions increased when the planning council asked the school district for data on test scores and failure rates for inclusion in the initiative proposal, information which had not previously been made available to the public. The school district was hesitant to release data at this sensitive time; they were promoting a large bond issue to build new schools as part of a new desegregation plan required under a federal court order. The initiative planning process had the potential to cast the school system in a negative light just as it was trying to look good to the voters. The superintendent subsequently assigned deputy superintendent Cecil Carter to represent the school district on the council’s education task force, which would develop school-based interventions in accordance with the Casey planning document.

Despite the tension between the school district and the planning council, School Board President Dr. Martha Fay, a retired scientist and long-time child advocate, felt that the school district’s students would benefit from the initiative: “There were actually several good remedial programs that the school district was trying to implement at that time but didn’t have the funds to support. The school system had a lot to gain by supporting the initiative.”

As planning progressed, Mendonsa worked to secure the required matching funds. The Savannah City Council voted unanimously to contribute $500,000 annually to the five-year initiative; the School Board, Chatham County Commission, and the state of Georgia followed suit. The Coastal Empire United Way pledged $100,000 per year, and Georgia’s Department of Labor contributed $200,000 for the first year. Other agencies, like the Chatham County Health Department, made in-kind contributions in the form of personnel, facilities or supplies.

The grant required a plan to create a decision-making body to oversee the initiative in Savannah, and this was to be the YFA. This entity was formalized when the state
legislature voted to vest the YFA with the authority to oversee the New Futures initiative; few other New Futures governance structures were vested with formal authority by their state legislatures. YFA would be led by an “Oversight Collaborative,” fifteen board members appointed by the initiative’s primary funders. The city council, county commission, and school board appointed four members each, and three state agencies — the Department of Human Resources, the Department of Labor and the State (School) Superintendent’s Office — each designated one appointee (Attachment 2). Most of the people appointed to the Oversight Collaborative had actively participated in the initiative’s planning process, including Bill Sprague, Jim Piette, Don Mendonsa, Otis Johnson, and Martha Fay.

Launching the Initiative

In March 1988, the Casey Foundation selected Savannah to be a New Futures city. The Foundation’s staff came to town to officially award the grant, and as Otis Johnson described, it was a day to remember: “We were very proud that day, proud to have an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children in our community.”

Next, an administrative director was needed to manage the initiative’s work in Savannah. Although many candidates from across the state and beyond applied for the position, Dr. Otis Johnson was hired to be the executive director. Johnson was an ideal candidate in many respects. Having lived in Savannah most of his life, he already knew many of the Collaborative members, child advocates, educators, and elected officials with whom YFA would be working. He was knowledgeable in both a professional and personal sense about socioeconomic conditions affecting Savannah’s black youth, who accounted for 80% of the at-risk children in the community. This is not to say that Johnson enjoyed uniform support among Savannah’s African-Americans. As Johnson explained: “Savannah is in the heart of the bible belt, and Southern Baptist churches exert a lot of influence down here. Many Baptist ministers will tell you the only obstacle our youth need to overcome is sin. So when I stand up in community meetings and state that we need to be providing family planning services to prevent teen pregnancies, the Southern Baptist ministers — black and white — are very unhappy with me.”

With Johnson at the helm, YFA’s first fiscal year began in July 1988. His first challenge was to make sure that the initiative’s educational programs targeting Savannah’s at-risk youth were up and running by the time school started that fall. In its proposal to the Foundation, Savannah had outlined a three-pronged approach for improving the school performance of at-risk youth. It included:

• expanding remedial school programs targeting the school district’s most vulnerable middle and high school students;
• establishing a pilot case management system that would provide intensive counseling to failing middle and high school students; and
• advocating for reform in the school district’s structure, policies and curriculum.
This approach would enable YFA to provide short-term support to Savannah’s at-risk students through remedial programs and the case management system, while advocating concurrently for long-term reform in the school district’s structure and educational policies.

YFA’s Collaborative shared leadership on the school reform issue with the Savannah Chamber of Commerce, urging use of a strategy pioneered in the “Boston Compact.” This called for city officials, educators, and the business community to develop joint goals and commitments relating to school reform, with the ultimate goal of increasing the students’ academic skills and employability, and to document the agreement in a compact. A coordinator hired with New Futures funds and supervised jointly by YFA and the Chamber was hired to negotiate an acceptable agreement among the schools, local business, and state agencies. The Collaborative was particularly interested in developing a compact, which linked school system reform goals to jobs for high school graduates.

**YFA Implements School-Based Programs**

To gain the support of the school board and district administration, the education task force had asked the school district to develop the remedial educational programs that would be offered in four schools with the highest percentage of at-risk students. The specific goals of the interventions were to improve math and reading skills, improve attendance rates, and prevent students from failing a grade. Task force members assumed that school district personnel, under the deputy superintendent’s supervision, were developing these interventions. Then, in a meeting held one month before the proposal was due to the Foundation, task force members learned that school district personnel knew little about the programs they were supposedly planning. Subsequently, the school district staff quickly pulled together a set of programs, most of which were already operating on a small scale.

In early 1988, Cecil Carter was appointed as the new school district superintendent. Carter had designated district staff members to implement the New Futures programs and work with the YFA, but he otherwise offered them little backing. Staff implementing the programs found that some principals at New Futures-designated schools were pleased to sponsor new programs, but others were less enthusiastic. As one school district staff person described the environment: “For collaboration and reform to succeed, people in your own system have to believe that change is necessary. We had some people who were willing and wanted to change. Others weren’t willing to change.” As executive director of YFA, Johnson had the task of ensuring that the remedial programs were being carried out by school district personnel over whom he had no direct authority.

Some of these programs (Attachment 3) were administered solely by the school district; others were administered jointly by the school district and agencies, like the Chatham County Health Department. Many of the programs aimed to provide students with both social or health services, *and* remedial education services, because at-risk students'
academic problems were often exacerbated by personal situations that interfered with their schoolwork.
Case Management: A New Service Model

The Case Management System (CMS) was administered directly by YFA. The Casey Foundation required that New Futures cities establish a case management system with the goal of helping more young people succeed. It was to be a mechanism by which existing services to students were coordinated and a way to provide a source of information to the Collaborative about gaps in existing services. The primary goal of Savannah’s case management system was to prevent at-risk students from failing or dropping out of school by providing them with access to community services that would address problems which distracted them from school. The theory was that case managers would assess the needs of selected at-risk youth, decide what types of services students needed, function as social service “brokers” for students with other agencies, and follow up with referral agencies to ensure that students received those services. In its planning guide, the Casey Foundation emphasized the importance of follow through: “That adult has to have the ability or the authority to see that the necessary help gets delivered.” The CMS would guarantee that selected at-risk youth would have access to at least one adult who could track their problems and progress.

YFA could have contracted with a local social service agency to provide these services to students, but the Collaborative wanted case managers to conduct student assessments and develop service plans free of institutional biases and constraints. Since CMS funding came from Youth Futures, the services provided would, in theory, not be dictated by a single funding source, as many categorical programs were in larger agencies.

With only three months in which to design the CMS and hire case managers, YFA had to make quick decisions about a complex system. Dr. Johnson was operating YFA with a bare bones staff (Attachment 4), and had his hands full working with the newly formed Collaborative and trying ensure that other initiative funded programs were under way. He hired a director to manage the system and left operational and personnel matters in her hands. Many of the program’s day-to-day details, however, were worked out by the case managers as they went along, and there were no formal job descriptions written up for the case managers until the second year. Lacking clear direction and extensive training, case managers spent most of their time on the role they most easily understood, that of mentor to the students.

YFA’s decision to establish its own case management system was noted with skepticism by some local social workers, according to Edward Chisolm, a YFA case manager: “YFA was initially viewed by many people in the social service community as a renegade organization. Some people thought YFA was trying to set up a ‘superstar’ system of case managers. Other social workers didn’t understand what YFA case managers would be able to do for clients that they weren’t already doing.” While some directors of large social service agencies on the Oversight Collaborative may have supported the CMS, that message did not always trickle down to mid-level managers in those directors’ agencies. In some cases, the mid-level managers understood that YFA was trying to create a new
model of service delivery, but thought that their efforts would have been better spent helping reform existing institutions rather than creating another, parallel system.

School district personnel, especially at the New Futures schools, didn’t understand why YFA was setting up a Case Management System when “Services to Assist Youth Teams” (STAY) (Attachment 3) were already counseling at-risk students. The reason for setting up the Case Management System, and the difference between the two programs, seemed clear to YFA executive director Otis Johnson: “The Case Management System was something we had to do. STAY Teams were supposed to take care of academic and in-school problems; our case managers were supposed to take care of out-of-school and family related problems. They were supposed to work together for the benefit of the student.”

CMS Takes Hold

YFA case managers began offering their services in the fall of 1988 at two middle schools and two high schools where the largest proportion of the school district’s at-risk students were enrolled; two more middle schools and two more high schools were added the following year. Students identified and assessed by the existing school-based STAY Teams were offered case management services if their problems required services not available in the schools. During the first two years of the initiative, over 600 students out of approximately 2,052 of at-risk students (29%) received case management services (Attachment 5).

YFA case managers were assigned to one school and worked with thirty or more students. Case managers spent most of their time in the schools, so that they were accessible to the students. Students typically had a host of problems: drug or alcohol abuse, conflict with family members, a parent in trouble with drugs, financial crises, children of their own or an unplanned pregnancy, and a pattern of school failure that had diminished their self-confidence.

Tonya was like many New Futures students referred to case managers: “A 14-year old African-American girl, she wears a chain with a medal of a small gold handgun around her neck. She was referred for case management when she was in sixth grade because she was considered to be at risk of dropping out of school. Tonya failed and had to repeat fourth grade, and now, in sixth grade, her report card was filled with “D’s.” There was also a question of physical abuse by her mother. Melanie, Tonya’s YFA case manager, sent her an introductory letter at home, tried to call her three times over the next month, and finally managed to catch her at school two weeks later. They talked about Tonya’s grades, her relationship with her mother, who worked as a cook in a restaurant, and her long-term goals. Tonya said she hadn’t really thought about what she wanted to do after high school.

Based on these initial assessments, case managers like Melanie tried to help students develop short-term goals for the school year, like improving their attendance at school, and
Creating a Youth Services Collaborative in Savannah, GA. (A)

long-term goals, such as completing high school and identifying possible careers or vocations. The goals were written up into contracts that students signed. During the program’s first year, there was some confusion between STAY Teams (hired by the school district) and case managers (YFA employees) because both sets of staff thought they were responsible for developing the contracts with students. By the second year of the initiative however, the STAY Teams and case managers had clarified that the case managers were responsible for connecting at-risk youth with community services and STAY Teams, for tracking students’ school performance.

Once case managers determined which services students needed to meet their goals, students were referred to New Futures school-based programs or to community agencies. Often, case managers found that students were being raised by single parents who were struggling with their own problems, and who couldn’t or wouldn’t follow through on referrals or recommendations that the caseworkers made. For example, when Melanie first visited with Tonya and her mother, she encouraged the mother to arrange a physical for Tonya at the teen health clinic, and for Tonya to start seeing her mental health counselor again: “Melanie learned at a second home visit a month or so later that Tonya’s mother had not followed up with either the therapist or the teen health center. She also learned that Tonya was being investigated by the child welfare department for hitting her 8-year old cousin.”

Case managers often found themselves responding to crises like Tonya’s rather than helping students progress toward their educational goals. Compounding this problem, case managers were not able to spend much time with students, and teachers didn’t want students meeting with case managers during class time. In Tonya’s case, for example, her case manager only saw her twice a month, typically for fifteen to twenty minutes between classes.

Like Tonya, New Futures students frequently needed health or social services in addition to educational services. Most of these services were obtained through existing agencies in Savannah. Part of the case managers’ job was to make those referrals, and then to ensure that students had in fact received those services, but there were no formal agreements between YFA and community agencies that guaranteed New Future students priority service. Sometimes case managers were able to use their personal contacts to massage eligibility paperwork or to squeeze a student into a mental health clinic’s already full schedule. Otherwise, students were subject to long wait periods and lengthy intake procedures at large community agencies.

For several reasons, it was difficult to assess whether the case management system was having a measurable impact on students. Case managers often referred students for categorically-defined services at traditional agencies, so children ended up receiving piecemeal services from agencies they had been served by in the past. Attrition among New Futures students exacerbated these problems: approximately 10% of at-risk students targeted for New Futures programs transferred schools during the year, and there was no system in place to track those students who ended up in schools without New Futures
programs. In addition, it proved difficult to develop a useful case management information system; for example, needs assessments and service plans on the same student were kept separately. Data on New Futures students was difficult to access and incomplete.

**YFA Collaborative Grapples with System Barriers**

Case managers were in a unique position to provide the Collaborative with frontline knowledge about the availability of services to meet their students’ needs. They were expected to document barriers to service provision or lack of services to the case management supervisor who was to report these “system” problems to Otis Johnson, who would share the findings with YFA’s Collaborative members. With the school superintendent and some of the larger social service agency directors sitting on the Collaborative, it was hoped that these service gaps and system problems could be addressed and resolved at the Collaborative level. What case managers viewed as a “system” problem, however, Collaborative members viewed as a staff problem. As Dr. Johnson explained, “The Collaborative members did not discuss program implementation details relating to the Case Management on a regular basis. They were aware of these problems but they expected us to work them out. Their job was to focus on the bigger picture, to consider the initiative programs as a whole.”

Johnson found himself trying to resolve issues and conflicts that YFA case managers had with the STAY Teams, social service agencies, and the school district leadership without alienating people in those institutions or key Collaborative members: “At the same time, now you’re trying to keep the superintendent and the president of the school board, both of whom serve on the Oversight Collaborative, happy and at the table. Sometimes collaboration asks for a miracle in terms of driving a change agenda and at the same time confronting recalcitrant institutions.”

Johnson had his hands full just helping the Collaborative’s diverse membership learn how to work together: “Collaborative members came from so many different walks of life and had so many different viewpoints on these issues. There was a tremendous educational requirement.” Collaborative discussions, although sometimes painful and heated, eventually led to greater understanding of the problems of Savannah’s at-risk children among Collaborative members. “It took us two and a half years of steady work as a group to develop a common vision and to get a real commitment to that vision. Then we started to act like a collaborative. The interesting thing about it was that folks kept coming back. They stuck it out.”

**CMS Preliminary Outcomes: Cycle of Failure Persists**

It was becoming evident that New Futures students had a difficult time sustaining their achievements. Like Tonya, many who had participated successfully in New Futures programs lapsed back into a cycle of failure, especially if problems persisted at home. The students found it hard to maintain their success once they returned to the regular
classroom setting, or were no longer receiving case management services. Case managers could see that most of the students referred to them had histories of academic failure and behavior problems dating back to grade school. The number of students at New Futures schools having to repeat a grade also remained high: although 151 at-risk students at three middle schools received mid-year or early promotions during the 1989-90 school year, another 381 students at those same schools were retained that year.\(^5\)

In fact, there was little change in the overall status of Savannah’s at-risk students. High school students were still dropping out of school at virtually the same rate, and, although there was some decrease in student dropouts at New Futures middle schools, that trend was observed district-wide, so the improvement couldn’t be attributed to the New Futures programs.

**Youth Futures’ Dilemma**

Throughout YFA’s second year, Collaborative members grew increasingly concerned about the unchanging status of New Futures students and the lack of support from school administrators and some principals and teachers. They had not expected long-term improvements to occur overnight, but they were troubled that students seemed unable to sustain whatever short-term gains they did make. Some members, like Dr. Martha Fay, believed that YFA was not intervening early enough in children’s lives, as data showed patterns of failure, such as retention, starting in the early grades. This issue became a priority for Youth Futures Authority as its second fiscal year drew to a close in the spring of 1990. At that point, the Oversight Collaborative was beginning to work on a Second Phase plan for approval by the Casey Foundation that would detail how the initiative would be implemented in the remaining two years.

Collaborative members were also frustrated by the lack of progress that had been made by the school district on school reform. Political differences hampered the progress of the Savannah Compact as the Chamber of Commerce saw the coordinator’s role as managing school/business partnerships such as Junior Achievement, and the Collaborative wanted the coordinator to manage institutional changes that would fulfill the Compact’s goals. The Savannah Compact wasn’t completed until September 1990, and it would be some time before YFA could tell if the Compact would result in concrete changes in the school district. Cecil Carter’s lack of leadership on the initiative’s school-based programs was one of many issues that prompted the school board to ask him to step down from his position in September 1990.

**YFA at the Crossroads**

Meanwhile, Collaborative members continued to grapple with what the past two years meant for YFA’s future. The deadline for submission of their Phase Two plan to the Casey Foundation was rapidly approaching. As he drove away from the Collaborative’s 1990 summer retreat, Otis Johnson pondered what course of action Collaborative members should recommend. He and board members like Don Mendonsa had tried to
lead YFA in directions that would attack the root causes of student failure among Savannah’s at-risk youth, but as Mendonsa kept reminding his fellow board members, the Authority’s programs had made little headway. The Collaborative had told school officials at the outset that YFA would expand the school programs to every middle and high school in the school district, but after two years of very limited results, Tonya and dozens of children like her continued to fall through the cracks. The initiative seemed to be at a crossroads, and Collaborative members were uncertain which way to go. The Collaborative’s future, not to mention the potential for lasting improvements in the lives of children and their families, clearly hung in the balance.

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1 City of Savannah City Manager’s Briefing, October 30, 1986, p. 68.
2 City of Savannah New Futures initiative Proposal, pp. I-4, I-7 and I-11, 1988. The number of at-risk students in sixth through ninth grade was determined using enrollment and failure data from 1986-87. Students who had failed at least one grade were considered to be “at risk.”
The New Futures program attempts to reshape the basic policies and practices of those institutions that help determine the preparation and prospects of young people. It is not intended to be a research or experimental program created as a supplement, enhancement or even compensatory response to "business-as-usual" practices and policies. The New Futures program seeks to make long term changes in the operation, principles, and policies by which education, employment, and other youth services are administered, financed and delivered at both the local and state levels of government as well as in the private sector. The changes are envisioned as durable, continuing long after the period of Foundation involvement.

If nothing else, this dictates change on a large and intensive scale. A more modest effort would have little if any chance of making a measurable change in the total target population, and could be perceived as expendable during times of tight budgets. At-risk youth are typically those who cause the most trouble for service providers. By virtue of their alienation from mainstream social institutions, they may be disruptive in school, hostile or indifferent to those who try to help them, and defiant of the system's rules and norms. For all these reasons, many service providers — educators, caseworkers, and others — often prefer working with less disadvantaged youths or feel they cannot help the most disadvantaged. Consequently, priorities for energy and investment have remained with other groups and other issues. In the end, effective institutional change cannot occur until a community builds and sustains a real priority for its at-risk children.

This emphasis on changing mainline community institutions does not, of course, mean that supplemental or specialized programs for at-risk students are ineffective or irrelevant. Indeed, alternative curricula and schools have succeeded in helping many at-risk students finish school and achieve after graduation. But institutional change does mean incorporating the insights and elements of alternative programs into the mainstream school's response to at-risk students. It does mean initiating assessment, remediation, and individualized attention into middle school practices so as to reduce the number of students who become disaffected and disadvantaged by high school. Most of all, it means holding the school system, the youth serving agencies, the employment/training system,
and other community institutions accountable for assuring the preparation and promoting the potential of all young people.

It should be stressed that the particular components of an institutional change strategy will vary from community to community. In some places, it might involve a reallocation of existing resources to give more individual attention to at-risk students. In many communities, institutional change will entail curriculum revision or modified training programs, job descriptions, and performance evaluations to support greater teacher and administrator attention to the needs of at-risk students. And almost everywhere, there is a need to redesign institutional linkages between schools, training programs and employers in a way that reinforces school attendance, skill acquisition, and job readiness by the entire youth population. These examples simply illustrate the kinds and scale of institutional changes that are needed if we are to achieve a lasting impact on the futures of at-risk youth.

Within this general observation are two very practical cautions for those who will be designing New Futures proposals. First is the importance of resisting the temptation to use New Futures resources simply to expand existing projects targeted on at-risk youth. Instead of "divvying-up" new funds among the separate programs and organizations involved, the community-wide planning process can foster greater program integration and lead to collective decisions about program and policy priorities.

The second and related caution is to appreciate the complexity involved in a genuinely institutional approach to these problems. Put simply, New Futures objectives should be ambitious and long term, but the specific interventions and reforms proposed for getting there need to be realistic. They have to reflect thoughtful assessments of local realities: resources, capacity, manpower requirements, training needs, institutional resistance to change, the parameters of community acceptance and support for specific interventions, and the local and state ability to institutionalize new approaches. In summary, a convincing New Futures plan should describe what can be done in practice over the next five years to create what ought, in principle, someday be available for every at-risk youth.

A Framework

Following are the three principal elements comprising the framework for local New Futures initiatives:

1. Intervention should be early enough to prevent or at least minimize academic and related deficiencies as well as early pregnancy. Most dropout prevention and pregnancy prevention programs target youth in the late high school years. A wealth of evidence, however, suggests that if prevention is the goal — as it is in this case — then intervention must begin earlier. According to a leading analyst, late teen idleness is the last stop on a path that begins with academic problems in middle school or shortly thereafter. Poor grades or perceived inability to compete at this stage leads to reduced interest and
motivation, worsening school attendance and still lower grades. This deepening failure, in turn, prompts alienation, lowered self-esteem, disruptive behavior and disciplinary actions by school authorities. Parental criticism and peer labeling further reinforce defensiveness and negativity, leading ultimately to the decision to drop out as a way of avoiding school failure.

The New Futures program seeks to prevent this cycle from running its course. Therefore, the focus will be on those students who are still in school rather than on those who have already dropped out. Interventions should begin not later than the middle school grades, at or before a child's first signs of difficulty. Supportive programs should be maintained throughout the rest of their school years, and for at least one year after graduation. For practical purposes, however, the New Futures program may also include services for high school students in the first years of the program's operation. Within a few years, all students who participate will have been part of the initiative since middle or elementary school. The results should be most positive for these students since the intervention was begun early on, before problems became full blown. The practical result of this suggestion is that candidate communities should target the bulk of their efforts on students in middle school grades. This requires a special sensitivity to and understanding of the developmental needs of young adolescents. As one leading authority has written:

"The imperatives of early adolescent development are too compelling to be overlooked or denied. It is a time in life (when adolescents] experience the dramatic conjunction of rapid biological, social, emotional, and cognitive changes. Early adolescence is marked by a characteristic growth spurt, the appearance of secondary sex characteristics, and the onset of puberty. The psychosocial tasks of adolescence include forming a conscious sense of individual uniqueness and solidarity with group ideals. The challenge to schools is to work with people in an age group . . . at a time when they seek to extend their personal autonomy from adults and simultaneously to identify with them."15

2. Positive incentives should be used to alter institutional priorities and practices vis a vis at-risk youth. In many schools and community organizations, teachers and administrators who want to be responsive to the needs of at-risk youth often feel frustrated and hamstrung by a lack of resources — and often feel that the "system" discourages extraordinary efforts. The issue of incentives needs to be addressed forthrightly, for it is unrealistic — and unfair to school personnel and service providers — to expect new commitments from at-risk youth when the old measures of job performance and evaluation, for example, are unchanged.

Negative incentives that surround at-risk students must be replaced with positive ones. Successful dropout prevention, for instance, can be achieved only when problem students feel there are reasons to stay in school, and when teachers and administrators have reasons to keep them there. Providing such incentives requires creativity and a commitment within the community.
Such incentives need to be meaningfully related to the values of at-risk students; they must be sufficiently concrete and targeted to motivate desired behaviors; and collectively they must provide a credible message that current efforts create future opportunities. Illustrative of this kind of incentive are attentive teacher praise, public recognition for individual skill improvement, access to desirable after-school or summer jobs conditioned on attendance and effort, or job/scholarship opportunities upon graduation.


Positive incentives should also be extended to students who are not at-risk of dropping out of school as well as teachers and administrators. The peers of at-risk students should be encouraged to feel they have a stake in reducing the dropout rate and increasing overall academic skills at their school. The whole body of students in a particular grade or school may receive some tangible reward if their dropout or pregnancy rates, for example, are reduced.

In sum, the New Futures program places a premium on a clearheaded recognition that positive incentives are essential to Provoke system-wide reforms. These incentives must be carefully designed so they form a coherent and powerful community response rather than merely a patchwork of unrelated incentives. Without an integrated and comprehensive set of incentives, it is doubtful that lasting, significant progress on behalf of at-risk youth can be achieved in spite of initial good intentions.

3. Services should be provided in a way that integrates pregnancy prevention, education, and employment strategies. Many innovative and, in theory, well-designed interventions have failed because they have been undertaken in isolation. For example, good vocational programs that teach job skills ultimately fail if there are no jobs. School retention strategies that merely keep students longer but which do not remedy basic academic deficiencies end up merely postponing, not solving, the real problems.

As with the promotion of positive incentives, the New Futures program places great importance on integrating programs for at-risk youth. For example, while the causes of teenage pregnancy are complex and variable, research suggests that teenage girls who perform-poorly in school, see little career opportunity and have low self-esteem are particularly likely to become mothers at young ages. Poor education achievement has also been positively associated with earlier sexual activity among teenage boys. Indeed, dropping out of high school may be both a cause and effect of early pregnancy. Thus, not only are health education programs relevant to preventing teenage pregnancies — so are classroom and employment initiatives designed to increase academic success, skill acquisition and career opportunities.

Success in persuading at-risk students to stay in school and acquire skills depends, ultimately, on their expectations that their efforts will be worth it. For many, that means gaining access to a good job. Conversely, school efforts to prevent dropouts will not
succeed if school graduates have no better employment and earning prospects than students who have dropped out before graduation. Thus both school reforms and new employment opportunities must be visibly linked.

In short, it is important that local efforts not isolate a single problem and design programmatic strategies around that single problem. At-risk youth have many needs, and any effective strategy will have to address them in a coordinated, mutually, re-enforcing way.

One way to translate the principle of integration to an operational feature is to condition one set of services on the use of another. For example, a student may be eligible for employment services only if he/she is attending school full-time. This creates one form of a "linkage" that reinforces the inseparability of education and employment. Another way to maximize the likelihood that services are integrated on an operational level is to deploy various services at the same physical location, or create a function to ensure that a student has access to and actually uses services in different locations.

This approach provides the framework for the programmatic recommendations concerning (A) dropouts and academic achievement, (B) teen pregnancy, (C) youth employment and (D) case management that follow. They are treated separately here for purposes of clarity, although as just noted, they must be integrated in reality. In each of the four areas, we have specified some broad policy directions and programmatic components which appear, from research and experience, to be effective in changing the outcomes for at-risk youth. Wherever possible, we have illustrated these policy and program elements with more detailed program descriptions and reference materials in the appendices. However, it is important to caution candidate communities that the sample programs described in this document are only small discrete pieces of the more comprehensive reform plans the Foundation expects as part of New Futures. They are used here only as illustrations of some of the components of what must be a more far-reaching and strategic plan for assisting at-risk youth to become successful and productive adults.
Attachment 2
YFA
Oversight Collaborative

Appointing Authorities

- Board of Education (4)
- City Council (4)
- State Departments:
  - Labor (1)
  - Education (1)
  - Human Resources (1)
- County Commission (4)

Six ex-officio members appointed by Collaborative as a whole
School-Based Interventions
Supported by Youth Futures Authority

Services To Assist Youth Teams (STAY Teams)

One new program that the School District developed for the Initiative was the "Services to Assist Youth" (STAY) Teams, which provided extensive support services to at-risk middle school students. STAY Teams were made up of five people: a psychologist, a social worker, a counselor, a nurse practitioner, and an academic facilitator. STAY Teams would identify at-risk students via school records and teacher referrals, and then assess their academic, mental, social, and health needs. STAY Teams provided students with services themselves — or referred students to case managers working under YFA's supervision, if students needed services from community providers outside of the school. To provide more intensive, personal counseling than the district had been authorized to offer in the past, the state Department of Education exempted STAY Team members from state guidelines that normally precluded counselors from addressing issues beyond the scope of academic problems, like abuse or family planning issues. It was hoped that professionals on the STAY Teams would work together in assessing and serving students, and that they would provide an important resource for teachers and students that had been lacking in the past.

The response to STAY Teams varied in each school, and while they were generally welcomed, there was some confusion about the scope of their roles, especially in schools that already had nurses or counselors on staff. Some of the STAY Team counselors ran into trouble because they also reported to a supervisor responsible for district counselors, in addition to a person responsible for all New Future programs and the school principal. One such supervisor reprimanded her counselors for working outside the state guidelines, despite the state's waiver and support of the New Futures programs. A similar problem cropped up between the STAY Team nurse practitioners and registered nurse (licensed to perform fewer activities) staffing some of the schools. If school nurses discovered a health problem or concern that would render a student "at-risk" and thus eligible for New Futures services, they would not necessarily refer the students to the STAY Team nurse practitioners for assessment.

Comprehensive Competencies Program (CCP) Lab

Students with very low reading and math skills were usually referred to the Comprehensive Competencies Program (CCP) Lab, an intensive tutoring service which the School District had established on an experimental basis prior to the New Futures Initiative. The Lab was designed to bring students up to their age-appropriate reading and math levels, and the Lab's initial success prompted School District staff, with the Planning Council's approval, to target the Lab for Initiative support. Students participating in this program worked independently on reading and math tutorials for three periods a day, getting assistance as needed from teachers staffing the Lab. Students progressed at their own rates and were tested halfway through the school year to measure their progress. The School District had gotten permission from the State Superintendent's Office to promote students one or more grades if they demonstrated sufficient progress on the mid-year tests.

Teenage Parenthood Program (TAPP)
One school-based New Futures program, the "Teenage Parenthood Program" (TAPP), was jointly administered by the Board of Education and the Chatham County Health Department. TAPP had been in operation for a couple years, but was greatly expanded with funding from the Initiative. TAPP's goal was to help teenage mothers earn their high school diploma, develop job skills, and establish long-term goals. Services offered to the teens included counseling by a social worker, an after-school job training and tutorial program, career guidance by a counselor from the local Savannah State College, and summer daycare for teens attending summer school or working. YFA funds enabled this program to expand, hiring more staff and reaching more teenage mothers.

**Savannah Compact: School Reform**

YFA's school reform strategy was to get leaders in the business community to work with the Board of Education to identify skills that students should develop in school in order to become marketable employees in Savannah. YFA hoped that this process would prompt reform in the school district's curriculum. Collaborative members like Jim Piette asked Savannah's Chamber of Commerce to play the lead role in this reform work. The Chamber had, in fact, been working with the school system for several years, in addition to participating in studies examining problems like domestic violence, school drop outs, and teen pregnancy. In the early nineteen eighties, the Chamber had established a program pairing businesses with schools, so that businesses could become involved with and support individual schools in a more personal way. By the time YFA was formed in 1988, approximately fifty businesses had been partnered with different schools.

The Chamber agreed to work with school board to develop some mutual goals for graduating students. This agreement, called the Savannah Compact, was modeled after an agreement developed in Boston. Through the Compact, businesses would guarantee jobs for graduating seniors who met academic and employment criteria established by the Board of Education and Chamber representatives. Schools, in turn, would pledge to modify school curricula in order to help the students meet these standards. Although it sounded straightforward, the Compact required a new level of partnership between the school system and business community, and the negotiations to draw up the Compact stretched out over two years. While YFA waited for the agreement to be developed and finalized, it could do little more than encourage the two parties to continue working toward an agreement.
YOUTH FUTURES AUTHORITY

Oversight Collaborative and YFA Administration

Appointing Authorities

YFA Oversight Collaborative

YFA Executive Director

Administration

Program Contracts

Board of Education

County Health Department

YFA Case Management System (CMS)

CMS Supervisor

Case Managers

STAY Teams

CCP Labs

TAPP

Selected At-Risk Students
## Attachment 5

**YFA Case Management System**

### 1988-89

**Students Served**

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*Race/gender data missing for these students.

### 1989-90

**Students Served**

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*Race/gender data missing for these students.