



Georgetown, Texas

Collaboration Builds a NEST for Homeless and Transitioning Youth

A community coalition uses data, communications and shared goals to fulfill a dream of creating a special place for homeless and transitioning teens.



A special place for youth that redefines the standard drop-in shelter.

For years, community leaders here searched for ways to provide a special place for homeless and transitioning teens — a place to get a meal, to find a mentor, to get some sleep. Today young people get all that and more at The NEST, an idea that became a reality through a community collaboration's smart use of data, communications and shared goals.

The NEST (Nurturing, Empowering, Supporting for Tomorrow) is no standard drop-in shelter. At the one-story house along a suburban residential street, teens find basic supports like food, showers and clothes, plus a plethora of services such as individual and family counseling, tutoring, health education, and career exploration and job readiness courses.

The NEST exists because of The Georgetown Project, a 40-member collaboration of youth development organizations and individuals that, in its own words, "identifies needs and develops resources, relationships and services so that our youth become caring, capable and resilient individuals." The nonprofit's members come from business, government, education, health and religious organizations. Its activities include data-

based reports about the conditions of children and youth in Georgetown, an afterschool program for middle schoolers, youth summits, child care training and parent skill-building.

For nearly a decade, the Project spearheaded efforts to build support for a youth shelter in this community of 47,400 people, about 30 miles north of Austin. The Georgetown Independent School District estimates that each year about 200 of its students are homeless or living in transition.

Ready by 21 'provided the framework for our community to get on the same page.'

"When we got more focused and developed common goals, that's when things began to take shape," said Leslie Janca, executive director of the Georgetown Project.

Collaboration's Campaign Succeeds

Things took shape because the Georgetown Project and its local partners:

- collected and published data documenting the emerging issue and trends in local adolescent homelessness,
- held community forums to share that data and educate the community about the services and needs of those youth, and



- developed shared goals and outcomes for the program,
- which allowed for shared programming responsibilities, resource development and performance measurement, because everyone was on the same page from the start.

To do that the collaboration used Ready by 21® strategies, which “provided the framework for our community getting on the same page about this very important issue,” Janca says. Those strategies were also used “in securing comprehensive and coordinated action that blended resources and talents of many local agencies and organizations toward common goals and objectives.”

She added that Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets provided the common language of positive youth development that helped to strengthen relationships between sectors and agencies.

Contributions come from all over the community:

- The Georgetown Project owns and runs the home.
- The school district qualifies the students as homeless, assists in referrals and provides transportation to and from The NEST.
- Nonprofit partners in The Georgetown Project Collaborative for Children and Youth provide program and supportive services to the students.

- Churches, clubs and organizations provide evening meals at the drop-in center.
- Physicians provide health education and health services.
- Various groups – such as Sun City, a large Del Webb retirement community – provide volunteers and donations of hygiene essentials, non-perishable snacks, and school supplies.
- Southwestern University students serve as tutors and mentors.
- Local citizens, foundations, city government agencies, service clubs and business partners kick in funding.

The NEST opened in 2011, and served 50 youth in its first year, according to the Project. This summer the house is undergoing renovations. A summer employment project and local business experience program are keeping youth engaged during the transition.

For more information about the Georgetown Project, visit www.georgetownproject.org/index.php.

For more information about The NEST, visit www.georgetownproject.org/subprograms.php?id=1.

| August 2013

For more information, visit www.readyby21.org