



Nashville, Tennessee

Building a Big-Picture Action Plan

See how city leaders engaged their entire community to create a shared vision for their youth and a master plan to carry out that vision.



Be the change: A page from the Nashville Youth Master Plan

Nashville was frustrated. After all, the city had long demonstrated a commitment to children, youth and education, even standing as a model for other communities through its effective community-based programs, its Mayor's Youth Council, its youth focused coalitions and its engagement in national initiatives to improve youth outcomes. Despite all that, city leaders were not getting the results they wanted.

Instead, they got this:

- Fewer than 20 percent of city residents believed that Nashville was doing a good job ensuring that children and youth grow up ready for college, work and life.
- One-third of Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools' students reported not having an adult in their lives who they could speak to about problems.
- In 2008, only 72.8 percent of students graduated on time from high school.
- Physical child abuse in Davidson County (Nashville) was 2.5 times the national average.

Ready by 21 strategy calls for communities to get input from their stakeholders in youth work

"We weren't thinking big enough or strong enough," said City Councilman Ronnie Steine. "A patchwork of good was not going to make a difference."

Building a Realistic Plan

The first major step toward thinking bigger came in February 2010, when

Mayor Karl Dean, the Mayor's Office of Children and Youth, and over 50 key community leaders convened a Mayor's Task Force. Step one was the creation of a Child and Youth Master Plan to give the community something to rally around and help organize all of its youth-focused efforts into a shared framework. The city had committed to carrying out the Ready by 21 set of strategies, one of which was specifically germane to this task: Develop a "Big Picture Action Plan" for youth. That strategy calls for communities to get input from their myriad stakeholders in youth work, and provides guidance on ways to do it.

"Different cities have found different ways to make sure everybody has a voice in this process," says Larry Pasti, who works with Nashville and other communities as the Forum's director of field services.



The Mayor's Task Force pulled together the key people and organizations involved with youth in Nashville – including leaders from schools, government agencies, businesses and nonprofits, along with youth and parents – to develop the master plan. The Task Force consisted of more than 50 Nashville leaders from all sectors of the community and was chaired by Metro Councilman Steine, Renata Soto of Conexion Americas, and Jairus Cater, a senior at Martin Luther King Magnet High School. They held meetings, they gave input and, importantly, they were given responsibilities. The members were divided into committees and workgroups that focused on such matters as health, safety, out-of-school time, the education lifecycle, and mobility and stability.

The plan articulates 14 desired outcomes for all children and youth for a successful future.

One of the first and most important tasks was gathering the data and indicators necessary to determine the goals the city

wanted to establish for all youth across a broad set of outcomes. They then used those indicators to determine how progress toward those goals should be tracked and how Nashville's youth were doing on those outcomes. Armed with that information, the government and community leaders plotted a course of action to reach their shared goals and outcomes.

Crucial to this work was the contribution of youth and families at every level and phase. The Mayor's Task Force included youth representatives, and the Mayor's Youth Council (a group of 32 high school juniors and seniors who represent the geographical, racial, and ethnic diversity of Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County) partnered with the task force throughout the process. Nashville's youth offered their insights in a series of surveys, and community members participated in focus groups held across the city.

The Result

Nashville released the Child and Youth Master Plan in July, 2010 – a living document articulating the commitment to all Nashville area children and youth. The plan declares Nashville's adoption of the basic building blocks of the Ready by 21 strategies: building broader partnerships, setting bigger goals, collecting and using better data for decision-making, and implementing bolder strategies.

The plan articulates 14 desired outcomes for all children and youth for a successful future. The outcomes include safe and stable homes, safe places in communities, self-confidence, leadership and engagement opportunities, social equity, caring school environments, physical health and high-quality afterschool programs. The plan acts as a blueprint for people and organizations to work together, share resources and reach shared goals.

The Mayor's Office of Children and Youth oversees the implementation of the master plan with support from a small advisory council of community leaders. The office is responsible for prioritizing the strategies in the plan and establishing performance measures so the effectiveness of strategies can be gauged as they are implemented.

"The intent of the master plan," Mayor Dean said, "was to look beyond what takes place in the classroom from kindergarten to 12th grade and examine the many community and home life factors that impact our children's overall well-being and success. ... For the long-term viability of our city, we must work together as a larger community to ensure that all of our children have the necessary resources to thrive both in and outside of school."

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For more information, visit www.readyby21.org