Bright Futures

Participating Organizations

- Bright Endeavors, Chicago, IL

Please note that all data below was derived from the collaboration's nomination for the Collaboration Prize. None of the submitted data were independently verified for accuracy.

Formation

Type of Collaboration:

- Joint Programming to launch and manage one or more programs
- Merger by which governance, programs and administrative functions have been combined but which may or may not have included the integration into a single corporate entity.

Geographic Scope: City

Collaboration Focus Area: Human Services

Population Served:

- Children and Youth
- Homeless
- Minorities

Year Collaboration was Established: 2008

Goals Sought Through Collaboration:

- Leverage complementary strengths and/or assets
- Improve the quality of services / programs
- Address unmet and/or escalating community need

Reasons Prompting Collaboration:

- Advancement of a shared goal
- Response to a community need

Who Initiated Collaboration: Executive Director(s) / CEO(s) / President(s)

Number of Participating Organizations: 2

Were Partners Added or Dropped?: No

Consultant Role:

- To draft the governing agreement or provide other legal advice
- To conduct financial due diligence
- To facilitate negotiations or discussions that led to the formation of the collaboration
- To advise on human resources, benefits, or compensation
- To determine the value of assets (intellectual or physical property)
New Moms, Inc. is a Chicago charity serving pregnant and parenting, homeless and near-homeless teens and their children—providing food; supportive housing; education re-enrollment; career-readiness, parenting and life skills training; as well as age-appropriate child development programming with routine screenings for signs of abuse and neglect. New Moms’ Rising Star Program provides career-readiness services to participants. When they come to us, 80% have dropped out of school and are operating at an average 4th grade level. Therefore, education re-enrollment is encouraged whenever appropriate. Participants begin our mandatory “Discovery Process” interest and aptitude assessment, through which they formulate detailed, individualized “step-ladders” toward success in achieving career-track employment in their chosen career fields. Participants attend daily career-readiness classes, with topics ranging from workplace communication and self-presentation to budgeting and financial literacy. Participants attend case management sessions which address day-to-day struggles. With case managers, participants set personal development goals. Rising Star graduates are eligible to enter internships with Bright Endeavors, New Moms’ social enterprise (the subject of this collaboration). In Bright Endeavors internships, participants rotate between positions including: manufacturing, marketing, packaging, and sales of Eco-Friendly candles. Interns receive daily performance feedback and leadership training in a small-business setting. Since many of the young women we serve have survived on their own for years, we embrace their creativity and entrepreneurial spirits. We assist them in developing the skills required in order to obtain sustainable, career-track employment that will allow them to provide for their families. Throughout internships, participants attend professional development seminars; update resumes; and apply for jobs in their desired career fields; or enroll in appropriate educational programs. This way, participants transition directly from Bright Endeavors into permanent employment. Bright Endeavors formed in 2007, after one of its co-founders interviewed for a position at New Moms, Inc. Struck by the needs of the population, she declined the position at New Moms and drew from her background in Social Enterprise—founding Bright Endeavors with another Chicago Social Enterprise pioneer—providing crucial job experience and leadership training to pregnant and parenting at-risk teens. A component of New Moms’ Rising Star Program is placing participants in paid employment internships. Bright Endeavors quickly became an internship site. As Bright Endeavors’ Sustainable Candle business began to take off, the demand for product quickly outpaced their equipment and personnel capacities, necessitating expansion. However, the economic climate was souring, and fundraising had become increasingly difficult. Bright Endeavors asked whether New Moms might be interested in merging. Since 1996, New Moms’ vision has included a Social Enterprise component. New Moms saw an opportunity to fulfill its vision, with the expertise of Bright Endeavors’ existing staff; and the merger was formed. As we entered merger discussions, we remained entirely focused on our participants—creating a bi-partisan, respectful environment, which we believe has resulted in best-practices programming.

Management

Management Structure: One Executive Director / CEO / President

New Moms has been in existence for 27 years; has been financially stable for as long, with 14 years’ experience providing Career Readiness Services. With Bright Endeavors’ managing co-founder looking to enter partial retirement, it was easy to decide that Bright Endeavors would fall under New Moms’ management. This structure provides improved outcomes, because New Moms has always had trouble determining the success, gaps in training, and weaknesses of individual interns. We have always relied on the feedback of internships sites, but find that this feedback can be unreliable. While some managers may not want to get interns in trouble, others feel that interns should be performing at a higher level and do not tolerate some of the struggles the intern may experience. Through this collaboration, participants begin their internships at Bright Endeavors—a “training wheels” environment—while participants are required to function appropriately in a work environment, case managers receive real-time feedback on participant progress. This merger has allowed us to clearly and narrowly define our focus and outcomes, extend participant training time, and expand programming as a whole.

Challenges

Challenges to Making the Collaboration Work:

- Creating a shared culture
- Coordination / integration of programs & services
- Conflict between or among partners
- Accepting change
Our main challenges throughout this merger have been conflict between partners and accepting change. Because we came into the collaboration providing some overlapping services, it was easy to be hard-headed and not want to accept the opinions of others. We felt connected to the culture of our own programs, and had difficulty embracing a changing culture. In order to combat this, we developed an integration team of representatives from each of Bright Endeavors’ and New Moms’ programs; diplomatically developing our best-practice program model in a supportive environment. We encouraged one another to focus on our shared goal: serving teen-led families. This shared vision allowed merger discussions to be unbiased and respectful; focused on participant needs, desires, and goals. We recognized the strength, experience, and talents of Bright Endeavors’ co-founders—one of whom has over 10 years’ experience in Social Enterprise; and other of whom founded The Enterprising Kitchen, Chicago’s first Social Enterprise. We recognized the Bright Endeavors’ non-retiring co-founder’s leadership skills, appointing her team leader of integration activities, with oversight from New Moms’ CEO. This helped Bright Endeavors to feel that they were not simply being absorbed by New Moms, but were contributing to the ever-evolving culture of service as we developed shared program goals.

Impact

Internal Efficiencies and Effectiveness:

- Financial savings - Consolidation of management / administration
- Financial savings - Coordination / consolidation of programming
- Greater ability to allocate resources to areas of need - Greater ability for each partner to focus on core competency

Community Impact:

- Greater coordination of services (less overlap, duplication, fragmentation)
- Improved programmatic outcomes

We have measured the outcomes and benefits of this collaboration through: identifying obstacles and successes in individual participant journeys through New Moms and Bright Endeavors; participant feedback; and overall program outcomes monitored by real-time data through a management information system. As we regularly examine participant outcomes and needs, we locate program gaps; defining services, outcomes, and priorities in order to better serve this population. We have learned through this measurement that there is always room for improvement, in order to better serve our participants. As a result of the collaboration as a whole, we are able to provide programming to better serve pregnant and parenting teens and their children.

Model

This program is designed and intended for national replication; and is a model program because it separates case management from the Social Enterprise experience, encouraging participants to learn appropriate workplace behavior.