

Cornerstone Youth Center
Transition Plan: 2018 - 2021

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Creating A New Vision

The Background

The Cornerstone Youth Center was founded in 2000 to provide a safe social space for youth. Since that time, Cornerstone has gradually broadened its scope of service beyond the original notion of a drop-in site for youth and now includes school-based programming at three sites. The expansion into Heritage Junior High School and New Haven Middle School began in 2014 and was made possible by a grant from the Indiana Department of Education (“CCLC Grant”), as is The LEARN program offered at Heritage Elementary School run by LEARN.

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In 2016, the Cornerstone Board began evaluating the sustainability of the CCLC Grant and how the continuation of the grant could affect its overall operations. Specifically, there was concern over the requirement that the Center establish additional CCLC sites while receiving gradual and consistent decreases in funding from the DoE. After thorough consideration of the various scenarios, the Cornerstone Board decided to continue with the CCLC program for another year.

In 2018, Cornerstone finds itself at another critical juncture. Maintaining participation in the CCLC Grant would require that Cornerstone:

- Expand to another school site.
- Serve more students at each site.
- Produce better student learning outcomes.
- Subsidize a larger percentage of the cost of running the sites.

In addition to the challenge of raising its share of the cost of running the school-based sites, there is concern that developing the CCLC sites would detract Cornerstone from its traditional core of center-based programs and activities. In light of these concerns, the Cornerstone Board decided that it would withdraw from the CCLC Grant program as part of its pursuit of a renewed vision of itself for the future.

The Vision

Cornerstone Youth Center will spend the next two years positioning itself for long-term relevance, impact, and sustainability. Building on its success in youth development and community relations, Cornerstone will develop a program that includes the following components:

- **Enhanced Youth Programming**

Cornerstone will continue to provide drop-in hours, homework assistance, and summer activities for its traditional clientele. Emphasis will be placed on providing special, topic-focused events that will attract a wider range of youth.

- **Supplemental School-Based Activities**

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Cornerstone will maintain its presence in the New Haven Middle School and Heritage Junior High School to deliver programs and recruit participants in center-based programs and activities.

■ **Community Activities**

Cornerstone will promote usage of the Center for activities, presentations, and resources by outside individuals and groups that address a wide range of needs and audiences.

■ **Integrated Community Programming**

Cornerstone will develop programs and services that are family-focused and that promote inter-generational interaction.

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Building on Our Success

The new vision for Cornerstone is built on its prior success in the following areas:

Cornerstone has earned the trust of the youth it serves. Cornerstone defines its target population as youth in grades seven through twelve in the southeast quadrant of Allen County who lack access to education, financial, and social resources. Cornerstone strives to model and nurture a core set of faith-based values that allows youth to meet their educational, social, and spiritual need in an inclusive and non-judgmental environment.

A focus group was held with participants in the 2017 Cornerstone Summer Leadership Camp. Below are comments from the participants that speak to the nature and depth of relationship Cornerstone has developed with its core clientele.

- “Cornerstone provides a safe space where:
 - I can be who I am.
 - People don’t judge me.
 - I’m not pushed away.
 - I can trust people.”
- “Cornerstone is focused on where I are going, not where I come from.”
- “Cornerstone is inclusive and welcomes all religions, nationalities, and family situations.”

Cornerstone will build on its ability to develop meaningful, trusting relationships by providing specialized programs that will appeal to a broader range of youth. Examples include:

- College and career exploration
- Academic improvement
- Leadership development
- Community service

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Cornerstone has earned the trust of parents. Parents of our regular attendees are the best advocates for promoting the new vision for Cornerstone. We will recruit volunteers from among our parents to: a) engage other parents as volunteers in promoting the vision, and b) provide input to help the Cornerstone staff develop programs that are relevant to the needs of families.

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Cornerstone has credibility with the schools in its service area. Cornerstone will build on its current relationships with the middle and junior high schools in its service area to continue delivering some school-based programming, while encouraging greater participation in Cornerstone's center-based programs.

Cornerstone is known and respected in the community. Cornerstone is viewed favorably in the community. While it has expanded beyond the founding purpose of the Center, Cornerstone will leverage its visibility in the community to grow the number of individuals who can help the Center realize its vision.

Pursuing the Vision

Critical Uncertainties

As outlined above, Cornerstone has a foundation of success upon which it can build its vision as a communitywide resource. At the same time, there are some variables that are uncertain and will need further explanation. The major areas of uncertainty include:

- What the community needs from the Center and its ability to respond to those needs.
- Availability of funding for community programs.
- How youth will respond to a broader focus on the community.
- How the community will respond to the diversity of youth at the Center.

Time Line

Cornerstone envisions a three-year transition, broken down as follows:

Year 1: Develop the components of the new program model, which includes potential sources of funding and a revised staffing structure.

Year 2: Begin the transition to the program model, to correspond to the gradual reduction in CCLC Grant funds.

Year 3 to end of CCLC funding: Fully implement the new program model with revised staffing structure.

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Year 1 Activities

Year 1 of the transition is dedicated to: a) enlisting volunteers and advocates to engage the community in the transition; and, b) gathering input for the new program model. The table below lists the various groups to be engaged, the purpose of the engagement, and the group responsible for establishing communication with the group.

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Group	Purpose	Responsibility
Leaders/Influencers	Build advocacy	Board/Community
Seniors/Volunteers	Program input; Access to other populations	Staff/Community
Foundations	Gain support for the vision	Staff
Individual Donors	Gain trust and support for the vision	Board/Staff
Parents	Program input; build advocacy	Staff
System Administrators	Choose CYC for support services	Staff
Churches	Advocacy and referral	Board/Community
Past Board Members	Advocacy	Board