CITY OF KNOXVILLE

MADELINE ROGERO, MAYOR

Strategies and Ideas Generated from The Save Our Sons Summit

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE KNOXVILLE

SOCIAL WORK OFFICE OF RESEARCH & PUBLIC SERVICE

Strategies and Ideas Generated from The Save Our Sons Summit: Executive Summary

January 20, 2015

PREPARED FOR

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This project is funded through a contract with the Knoxville Police Department and the University of Tennessee, College of Social Work Office of Research and Public Service.

Contract Number: C-15-0164

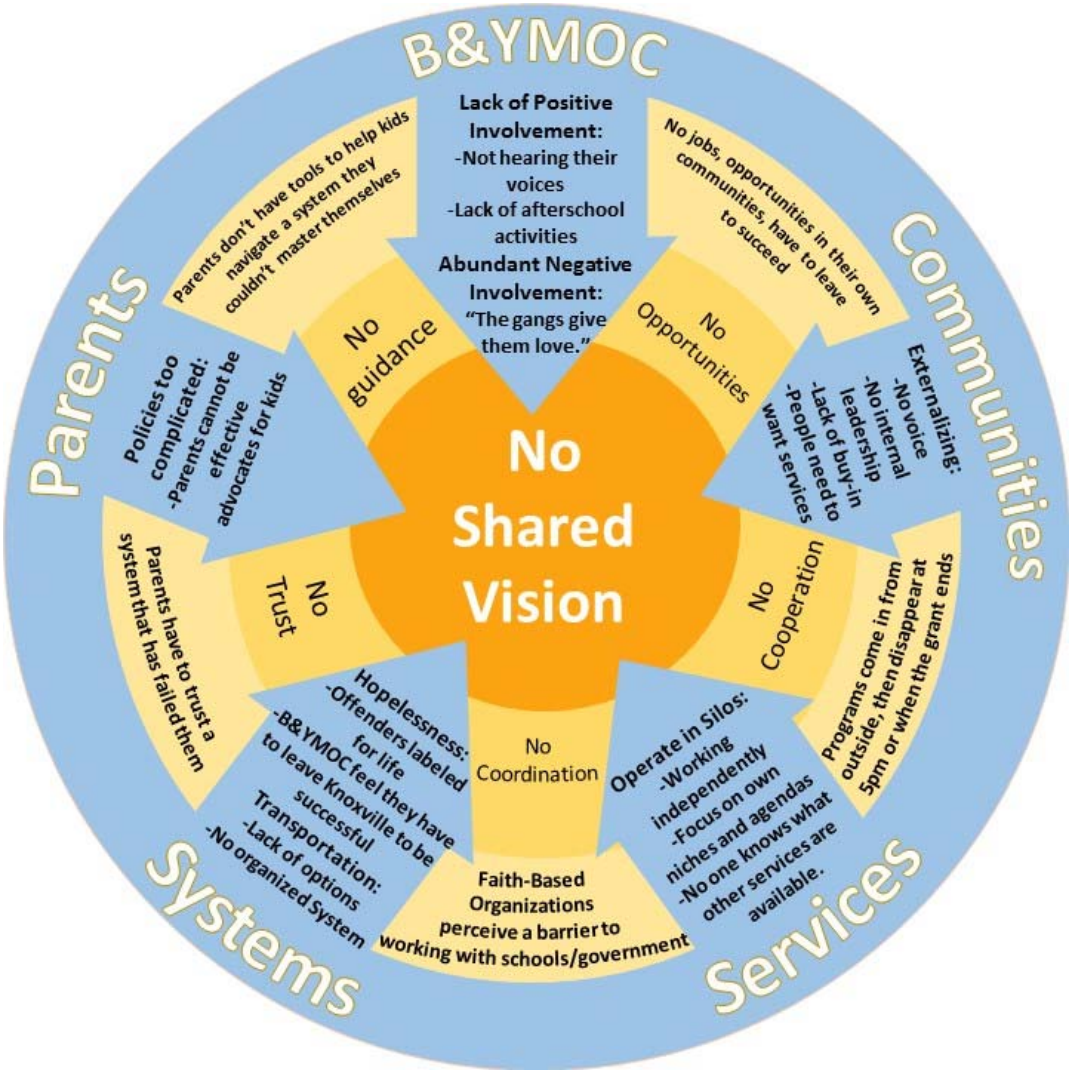
Project Number: 15005

Knoxville's Save our Sons Summit

On November 21, 2014, Knoxville Mayor Madeline Rogero hosted a local action summit to focus on reducing violence-related deaths and increasing opportunities for success among Boys and Young Men of Color (B&YMOC). Knoxville's Save Our Sons initiative is part of a larger national network of mayors called Cities United and in response to President Obama's My Brother's Keeper challenge.

Most pressing concerns

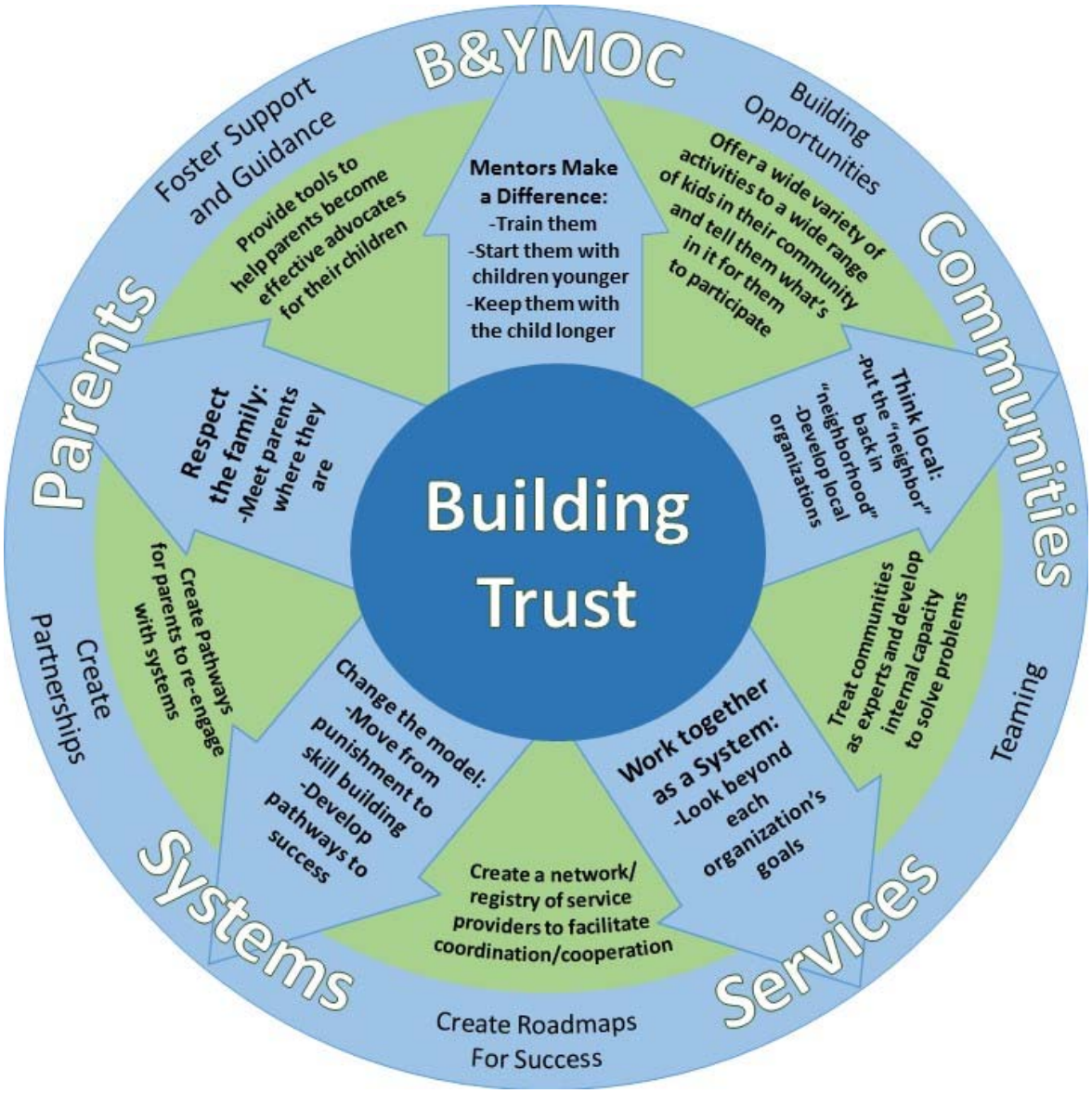
Participants reported a wide range of issues facing B&YMOC in the Knoxville area. They identified concerns stemming from the B&YMOC themselves, their parents and communities, service providers and the larger systems in which they operate. Participants felt the **voices of B&YMOC and their parents aren't being heard** and interventions aren't addressing the family as a whole. Support for interventions is lacking from individuals and the community because **service providers come from the outside.** Service organizations are also too focused on their own goals and **providers aren't coordinating or communicating with each other**. Finally, parents and communities don't trust the system. Many participants discussed the **strained relationship between KPD and the communities**. Others discussed the impact **labeling offenders for life** has; creating a **sense of hopelessness** for younger and younger children.



Solutions and Next Steps

Involving both B&YMOC and their parents was identified as a key for success. **Mentoring** for the B&YMOC, **starting earlier and lasting longer**, was discussed at almost every table. Service providers also have to respect the B&YMOC's family and meet them where they are. Recognizing that parents lack the knowledge and experience to help guide their child to make good choices and acknowledging the difficulty parents have trusting a system that has let them down previously will be key to any two-generation approach.

Participants wanted to see **more coordination and more communication** between organizations and service providers: "We won't succeed if we don't work together." "Coordination of services is so important." They suggested **clearinghouses, referral services, and service road maps** that would direct clients through providers to achieve desired outcomes. Participants also wanted service providers to **come from within and identify community leaders** to head the initiatives and engender community support.



When participants noted the strained relationship between KPD and the communities**,** they wanted to address the problem from both ends. For KPD, the key was to expand beyond the role of enforcement: "Get police officers out in the communities doing more positive things, **building relationships**." "Could officers provide transportation or have a program to work with the community? Let minorities and police interact in a positive manner." Additionally, participants felt **B&YMOC lacked communication skills**. Participants at several tables suggested **offering training for B&YMOC** to learn how to handle being pulled over by the police and talking with them about ways to **avoid confrontation**.

The issue of labeling offenders for life was of great concern as it can lead to a sense of hopelessness, even among children. "Middle school kids come to believe there is no future to being successful." Participants identified a program in Chattanooga that **encourages employers to hire people with previous convictions**. They talked about the need to **examine the impact of KCDC's "no trespassing" list** on this population. Finally, they discussed the need to **change the model from punishment to skill building** and the need to **start earlier**. "Find [other] solutions to send kids [who] are suspended – they may not have anyone at home during the day, other consequences like volunteer work, [where they] learn a lesson…accountability."

Participants also stressed that **efforts have to be communicated.** The need for open forums for communication among all parties: B&YMOC, parents, communities, organizations and systems.

What all of these come down to is the importance of Building Trust.

Relationships must be forged and strengthened through more and varied interactions, through internal development, through skill building and breaking down labels, through communication and through empowerment. The **recommended next steps are to solicit community involvement** and support by engaging key community members (sons, parents, leaders) in identifying solutions and interventions that they would value for their communities.