

CYSA 2012 Planning Session Work Plan:

Executive Summary: In Summer 2012, Connecticut Youth Services Association (CYSA) conducted two planning sessions to create a work plan for the next 2-3 years. The timing is notable as the organization is celebrating its 40th Anniversary. During the recent past, there has been a lot of discussion about the Organization's readiness to plan and prioritize its efforts. CYSA Board members identified the need to better articulate what CYSA is as a statewide organization and heighten awareness of its "worth" as a leader in children, youth and family service initiatives with both the membership and statewide organizations. One example of the lack of clarity that exists is a description of CYSA membership like a "club" as opposed to a powerful, statewide organization with member responsibilities. The mission statement was reworked and the roles and function of the Board of Directors were reviewed.

Critical issues for the Organization as a whole to focus on were identified: 1) Membership Connectivity defined as encouraging members to be more involved and make a greater commitment to CYSA, 2) Marketing and Public Relations of CYSA, 3) Data Collection and Publications, 4) Grant Funding Opportunities. Each of these four critical issues are interconnected but there is a sense of a sequential order to the work. Some of the strategies in the plan will outline the work of a part time consultant who will help CYSA's efforts proceed forward.

NEW Mission Statement: After some collective discussion regarding what CYSA is as an entity and how it needs to operate, the planning group honed the mission statement to accurately reflect what CYSA is and does.

Connecticut Youth Services Association leads, strengthens and supports a unified network of Youth Service Bureaus dedicated to promoting the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth and families.

Organization Analysis: Members of the planning group acknowledged that some of the difficulty with moving CYSA to the next level and being recognized as experts in the field of social services is because there is not a clear understanding of the Organization itself. Often the boundary lines between membership and the overall Organization get blurred. CYSA needs to define itself as an umbrella organization for the state's youth service bureaus. CYSA does not serve children, youth and families but rather the agencies and organizations that provide those services. Another point of note, some of the work of CYSA benefits all Youth Service Bureaus not just those who are members. CYSA does not self-promote its efforts enough to the membership so, in turn, the membership is not overly connected or engaged with CYSA. Clearly, those who have been active on the Board are engaged in a whole different way but there needs to be a way to translate that vision and value to the Membership. CYSA's value or "worth" to outside organizations and its own membership can be strengthened greatly by utilizing information from its membership about programming, outcomes and financial challenges and successes. The data collection system is almost available – getting the membership to buy in to it is a major goal. The planning group also discussed the Board itself, the intimidation that came with being a new Board member, the confusion that new Board members felt because of language being used around the table, and the fact that each member was mentored, encouraged and guided by another Board member.

Increasing self- promotion of its efforts including the qualities Board members value about CYSA to the larger membership is key to increasing membership commitment and buy in.

Based on the discussion during the day, the following issues regarding CYSA as a statewide organization were mentioned. As a way to truncate the information, items of note were merged with the SWOT list from the last Strategic Planning sessions (2005) to formulate the following list:

Strengths of CYSA:

- Strong, dedicated Board of Directors
- Quarterly workshops
- Networking – Both among membership and with state entities/other organizations
- Legislative Advocacy
- Information Dissemination (email/website)

Weaknesses of CYSA:

- CYSA identifying itself as a separate entity from Membership.
- CYSA's marketing and self-promotion
- Lack of Membership investment/commitment to CYSA
- Lack of complete data collection system – Kidtrax still needs work
- Lack of diversity/large cities on the Board
- Board meeting intimidation

Threats/Challenges facing CYSA:

- Not maintaining a committed membership base
- YSB funding and staffing limitations
- Lack of publicity about CYSA's work
- Location of meetings difficult for some bureaus (change regions?)

Opportunities for CYSA:

- Annual Report about CYSA's successes
- Collaboration with state agencies and other organizations to leverage funding
- Reinstitute welcome packets and mentoring for new members/Directors
- Work on new grant opportunities and mini grant process for membership
- Cultivating new leaders from the Membership
- Youth Leadership Conference
- Having a staff person

These are the reasons that Board members join and participate. But, these are not qualities that filter down to all of the membership. Next steps would be to improve communications with the membership and create a marketing plan/new public identity around these values.

Why do Board members value CYSA?

For the youth in our communities

For the future prospect of success

To be with like- minded people dedicated to the task of serving children, youth and families

Learn from others' expertise and lessons learned

Networking – ability to remain current on issues concerning YSBs

Ability to work with people freely share information and support each other

This Board gets things done!

Critical Issue #1: Membership Connectivity

The planning group defined this issue in a number of ways. CYSA has no function without its members. But the membership is not aware of the work that CYSA does and its worth. As CYSA looks to become identified as the state's leader of children, youth and family services initiatives, it is necessary to secure a commitment of increased involvement from the membership. Currently, response to email requests for information is low, interest in having a statewide data base is lukewarm at best (because of time and cost), uneven membership involvement (some are very involved, some do no more than pay dues). A dedicated staff person available to work on these member relations would help improve connectivity.

Tasks to Improve Membership Connectivity and Board Relations and Diversity

- Change the meeting to a more centralized location. Meriden is technically the center of the state and staff will work on some options to discuss at the September meeting.
- Open Board meetings up to one regional chapter per month on a rolling basis beginning with the November 2011 meeting. Visitors will be asked to bring information about their agency/program and speak for a few minutes about one of their successes/challenges, etc.
- Current Board of Directors would be prepped for this new outreach at September meeting. This may also be an opportunity to review the current Board meeting format.
- Sending staff member out with the Chapter Representative to meet individual members, targeting those who have not been very involved with CYSA. Encourage more active participation utilizing more technology while increasing the diversity of the Board to include some new communities including large cities and smaller towns.
- Strengthen and formalizing Chapter meetings and processes.
- Re institute the Welcome Wagon and begin an orientation for new YSBs and/or new Directors.
- Formalize the Mentoring Program. (for new Directors and Board Members)
- Revitalize the Public Relations Committee of CYSA: utilize more conference calling and skyping for meetings to assist in getting new people from other areas of the state involved.
- Update Website including new logo, video uploads, member success stories, more direct links, online giving, online conference registration, best practices, conference highlights, etc.
- Continue current memberships to other entities and start new relationships with others. Encourage YSBs to engage their own communities in CYSA initiatives including KidsTrax.

Critical Issue #2: Marketing and Public Relations

The planning group defined this issue as a major hole in the perception of CYSA. The organization does not do enough self-promotion of its successes. One participant stated that the Board “gets stuff done” – but the membership doesn’t know about all of it. Rebranding itself and putting forth more documents like best practice models, analysis of services, position papers on a range of topics, updating the website and republishing an annual report are all necessary to move this issue forward. CYSA also needs to continue to reach out to statewide organizations and agencies in order to be considered a member at the table. Funds recently awarded to CYSA by DMHAS were because CYSA was at the table already. It made it easy for DMHAS and CYSA has the ability to handle the task. It is necessary to carve out a distinctive role or niche for CYSA statewide.

- Update the logo: A variety of methods to keep this at low or no cost will be evaluated including students from local colleges. The goal is to unveil the new logo at the October 2012 conference.
- Increase utilization of technology including Facebook and an improved website. Staff will work with webmaster to begin the process.
- Begin to more frequently publish youth stories about diversion, best practices, annual reports and position papers and get them to the membership and press more efficiently. An annual report will be ready for the October 2012 conference. Staff will work with the Board to complete this project.
- A longer term task would be to hold one major fundraiser annually.
- Encourage buy in from private funders by presenting a stronger, more unified image of CYSA.

Critical Issue #3: Data Collection

CYSA has invested substantial time and energy in the Kidtrax data system. CYSA has been in the embarrassing position of being asked for data that should be easily attainable from members but is not. Lack of funds to finance the installation and maintenance of the system has made this even more difficult to accomplish. There is resistance from membership about paying for a new data base system and having the resources to input the data. There is a need for grant funding to finish the Kidtrax system and get it out into the communities so that CYSA can begin to document the successes of programs.

- Seek grant funding to provide dollars to install and then maintain system. Staff will assist in identifying a funding source and work to secure dollars. (annual cost about \$650.00)
- Encourage SDE to make Kidtrax a mandate. Inform and work with membership for 100% compliance. Initially, members will be encouraged to use Kidtrax, eventually it will be a mandate of membership to CYSA. If a member has a data collection system already in place it can be used provided it collects the same kind of data as Kidtrax.
- Get MOUs signed by members who agree to use Kidtrax.
- Begin to pull data reports and write position papers to show statistically what CYSA members accomplish. Leverage funding with data.

Critical Issue #4: Grant Funding

The planning group identified the need for an increase in grant funding opportunities through state and federal funding streams. Most entities similar to CYSA in other states have many staff members – CYSA has none. Funding for staff to facilitate the work discussed in this plan is key to the success of CYSA's efforts. Currently, many YSBs could be great places for those dollars to be spent but CYSA is just getting into a position now as a leader in children, youth and family service initiatives among statewide agencies. There is no internal mechanism for distributing dollars if they were awarded. In the past, CYSA has been overlooked as the conduit for these dollars to the local communities because they could not get the data needed for the application, there was a lack in confidence that CYSA could handle the funds or at the worst – CYSA was never even considered.

- This issue is one that will be discussed more thoroughly at a later date. Tasks would include setting up a mini grant process, defining a committee to seek out and assist in writing large scale grants, etc. Large scale grant opportunities are not an option until some of the above work – specifically the data collection has progressed.
- Secure DUNS# for federal grant applications. Staff will work on this immediately.