



In the summer of 2004, Youth Professionals and Regional Extension Educators in Community Youth Development were asked to write case studies about community efforts to coordinate out-of-school time programs. They examined how the coordination occurred and how it impacted availability of programs for young people. They also captured the lessons from the coordination efforts that could help other Minnesota communities work together to increase programs and opportunities for youth.

This is one in a series of ten reports.

## About The Community

The Greater Mankato Area includes Mankato and North Mankato and is located along the Minnesota River in south central Minnesota. Mankato was recently voted number one in Minnesota and 14th nationally, for being the most livable *micropolitan* city in America (*Live in America's Small Cities, 1997*). As a regional center with a diverse economy, Greater Mankato serves about 10 times its own population of 44,225. The Greater Mankato Area provides employment, shopping, educational enrichment, and social and recreational events for smaller communities in the region. They also have a bus transit system, Mankato Heartland Express and Kid's Cab.

The Greater Mankato Area is home to five institutions of higher learning, including the Minnesota State University (MSU), Minnesota's third largest university. MSU attracts nearly 14,000 students from 48 states and 71 countries. The Mankato Area public schools rank in the top third nationally as excellent education choices. There are 7,827 youth enrolled in grades K-12 in both public and private schools. Mankato/North Mankato has two public high schools. The school's strengths include having one of the lowest high school dropout rates among the nation's small cities. During the 1990s, the number of people of color more than doubled and this

trend is expected to continue. Mankato and North Mankato call themselves "a little Twin Cities."

## What's Happening in Out-of-School Programming?

The Greater Mankato Area has about 75 different organizations, programs, or agencies that provide out-of-school time opportunities for school-age youth. These opportunities range from physical activities, structured sports, the arts, hobby and special interest clubs to mentoring, leadership, and citizenship focused groups.

The largest providers of out-of-school time opportunities in Greater Mankato are the YMCA and the Greater Mankato Community Education and Recreation Department, which gets funding from the school district. The Mankato YMCA is a newly renovated, 50,000+ square foot facility which provides after-school programming, summer programming, and mentoring. The YMCA serves over 10,000 youth who have enrolled in one of their 75 programs or have used one or more areas of their facility. The YMCA offers financial assistance for their programs—they will not turn anyone away due to financial limitations.

The Greater Mankato Community Education and Recreation Department provides

summer youth camps and summer programming on the playgrounds of neighborhood parks. They also offer enrichment classes, sports and recreation activities for preschoolers-sixth graders after school, in the summer, and on Saturday mornings year round. There are a few leisure activities offered for teens all year as well.

Even though there is a transit system in the Greater Mankato Area, transportation is still identified as a barrier to youth being able to access OST opportunities.

#### **DATA FROM THE CENSUS**

Population Mankato/North Mankato: 44,225  
Population 18 years and under: 20%  
Population 65 years and older: 11%  
Population of students receiving Free or Reduced Lunches K-12: 28%  
Square miles of cities: 19.9

## **About the Coordination Effort**

There is not one overall coordination effort going on in Mankato for all out-of-school time opportunities. There is, however, coordination around getting kids involved in programs that fit their individual needs. This is provided by the South Central Children's Project (SCCP) through a service called Youth Development Coordination. There are also two groups facilitated by the Greater Mankato Area United Way, which coordinate a youth employment program for 14-16 year olds and an active citizenship program for youth to ensure responsible citizenship now and in the future. The United Way is working with multiple youth serving agencies and programs to ensure intentional outcomes for youth in the Greater Mankato Area. While these two entities, United Way and South Central Children's Project, have separate efforts they also are strong

partners in successfully matching youth with programs throughout the Greater Mankato Area. The United Way contributes funding to the South Central Children's Project to support a Youth Coordinator position and scholarships for youth participation in out-of-school time activities. This partnership has been going on for 10 years.

#### **Mission:**

One of the primary prevention services provided by SCCP is Youth Development Coordination. SCCP has a full-time coordinator whose job is to help children and youth become involved in healthy activities and relationships in the community. Impoverished and "working poor" families have access to supplemental funds so as to enable their children to participate in organizations and to facilitates these organizations' capacity to connect with and serve "at-risk" youth. The Greater Mankato Area United Way's two initiatives were created to help build more collaborations and capacity in the community in order to recruit underserved youth and connect them with positive experiences in employment or community service.

#### **Leadership:**

The current Youth Development Coordinator for SCCP has been in that position for eight years. This is the pivot person between youth program providers and youth needing or wanting to get involved in out-of-school time activities. He is given direction from the SCCP Joint Powers Board, Children's Cabinet, and Advisory Board. The Joint Powers Board includes one commissioner each from both Blue Earth and Nicollet counties, one school board member each from Mankato/North Mankato, Lake Crystal Welcome Memorial, Maple River, and St. Clair school districts, and a parent. The Children's Cabinet involves the directors of Blue Earth and Nicollet County Human Services, Blue Earth County Community

Corrections, a Superintendent from each of the school districts, a parent representative, and a day treatment provider. The Advisory Council is made up of a social worker, chemical treatment worker, County Community Health Planner, Community Corrections Officer, Community Education Coordinator, Special Education Director, Minnesota State University social worker, Minnesota State University counselor, two parent representatives, and representatives from Head Start, Minnesota Valley Action Council, YMCA, YWCA, Social Security, Lutheran Social Services, Greater Mankato Area United Way, Community Assistance for Refugees, Family Resource Center, Affordable Housing Partnership, and the Minnesota Department of Health. The SCCP also has Co-Location Workers who serve in elementary schools to help at-risk or early-identified children and their families succeed in school and in the community.

### **Membership:**

The Youth Development Coordinator has knowledge of all the out-of-school time opportunities in Greater Mankato and maintains connections with each program provider. It is a very informal system; a provider is automatically a part of the referral process for youth in need of opportunities.

### **Structure:**

The entire South Central Children's Project staff is involved in connecting youth to out-of-school time opportunities, although the primary responsibility for this coordination effort is assigned to the Youth Development Coordinator. There is a Central Intake Team in the SCCP made up of caseworkers and other direct service workers. They meet three times a week and give referrals of kids needing out-of-school time opportunities to the Youth Development Coordinator. The Co-Location Workers also get referrals and they may "hook up" these kids directly with an opportunity or go through the Youth

Development Coordinator. The appropriate SCCP staff then meet with the child and the family to determine needs and interests before directing them to an out-of-school time opportunity in the community. The Youth Development Coordinator is very connected to the Greater Mankato Area and is a member of many community initiatives and sub-groups that work in the area of youth development and who provide services and/or opportunities for at-risk youth.

Last year the SCCP Youth Development Coordination effort helped nearly 900 youth to be involved in at least one out-of-school time opportunity, which they would not otherwise have been able to afford. This has reinforced the need for the effort.

### **Cost:**

The funding for the Youth Development Coordinator comes in large part from the Greater Mankato United Way and some from other SCCP sources. The budget for this coordination effort is \$110,000. This includes the staff salary and the cost of the out-of-school time opportunities that youth are enrolled in when they are unable to pay any or part of the fee. The SCCP also has a Youth Work Experience program, which is budgeted about \$45,000 to help pay for youth's wages while employed at a business in the community.

### **The impetus for coordination:**

The Youth Development Coordination happened due to the vision of the founding SCCP partners, particularly the United Way. They wanted to fund scholarships for youth participation as well as the salary of the Youth Development Coordinator. The position of the Youth Development Coordinator was for "pure" prevention work, to plug youth into activities. The other 12-14 staff members of SCCP worked in the early intervention arena, but started to do prevention work (plugging kids into activities) as time went on. In addition, this effort was identified as a need through

the results of the Search Institute *Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors* survey and the Minnesota Student Survey. The director of the SCCP commented that looking at the local demographics of youth and their families also aided in identifying the need for this coordination effort.

The Greater Mankato Area United Way vision council recently created two other efforts in the areas of youth employment and responsible citizenship. They have done this to assist in expanding both the Youth Development Coordination and the Youth Work Experience effort for underserved youth because the need in the community is increasing.

### What else has happened in the community to impact availability?

- Due to this coordination effort the SCCP has received a grant from the Carl and Eloise Pohlad Foundation beginning in 1999 to pay for summer camp opportunities for about 43 low-income and at-risk youth.
- The Mankato Area Schools are recipients of a **21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Center Grant** that is administered through Mankato Area Community Education/Recreation Department. They partner with the Salvation Army to provide after-school and summer programming for school-age youth.
- The **YWCA** has partnered with the Mankato Area Elementary Schools to provide a school-based after-school program, which serves approximately 120 youth each year.
- The continuation of Local Collaborative Time Study and Target Case Management money helps fund SCCP initiatives.

### What could stimulate more local action?

- **Additional funding for more staff and to cover more of the program costs for youth served.** The present Youth

Development Coordinator feels that the quantity and quality of OST programming in the community is good, the connections are there, but the budget is decreasing and the case loads are increasing.

- The Greater Mankato Area United Way has identified **transportation** as a huge barrier for all groups including youth. The schedules and routes currently available with the Mankato Transit System do not meet community needs. Cost of transportation is also a factor (\$1.25 per trip or \$.50 with a youth pass).
- The Director of SCCP suggested that the state set up a **system of matching dollars raised locally** for out-of-school time opportunities and support as an incentive for communities.

The coordinator shared stories about how this coordination has made a difference.

### Implications for other communities:

1. **Relationships** between the various program providers themselves and between the providers, youth, and their families are absolute keys to coordination.
2. **Kids need to be the “drivers,”** they need to make some of their own choices in order for the opportunity to be positive.
3. **Following up with families is important;** sometimes families going through challenging circumstances forget about the activities their kids are signed up to be involved in and need reminders about supporting participation. This takes time and good communication.
4. **Implementing this kind of coordination effort greatly impacts the accessibility for underserved, disconnected youth** because they have one person whose job it is to connect them appropriately regarding their needs.

5. **In this model the Youth Development Coordinator communicates well with all the youth program providers.** This has encouraged all the program providers to work together on behalf of youth and there are few, if any turf issues among them.
6. **Having this “pivot person” coordinating the out-of-school time effort has impacted the building of public will** by influencing an increase in positive publicity for the youth in the community. It has also increased the

willingness of community program providers to partner and take extra steps to involve underserved youth.

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**Sources:** Minnesota Minority Partnership; I.S.D. #77; U.S. Census Bureau