

2010

Will County Resources for Developing Targeted Behaviors, Skills, and Attributes in Youth



Traits

- Honesty
- Initiative
- Moral Character
- Perseverance
- Integrity



Skills

- Communication
- Problem Solving
- Team Contribution
- Leadership
- Organization
- Critical Thinking



Behaviors

- Positive Work Ethic
- Community Involvement
- Self-directed Learning
- Lifelong Learning
- Respect of Self and Others
- Conflict Resolution

Success in Life and Career

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Section 1: Executive Summary

Will County Cares, a partnership of education, business, and civic leaders in Will County, Illinois, has identified 17 behaviors, skills, and traits needed by youth to succeed in life and work. In the fall of 2009 they commissioned a study to better understand the extent to which these behaviors, skills, and traits are being developed in area youth between 5 and 18 years of age. To this end, information was collected from 198 Will County business employers, government agencies, human service organizations, and schools or educational institutions to address five basic questions.

1. *Who is perceived to be responsible for building the targeted traits, skills, and behaviors in Will County youth?*

While viewed as a community-wide enterprise, developing the targeted behaviors, skills, and traits in youth was overwhelmingly seen as the responsibility of parents and family members, the youth themselves, and schools. Faith-based organizations were viewed as playing a significant role in developing traits, and employers were seen as important in skill development.

2. *What programs are available that address the traits, skills, and behaviors identified by Will County Cares?*

Of the 188 youth-serving programs in the study, more than one-half (53%) were provided by educational institutions. Human service organizations provided 24%, employers represented 16%, and government agencies made up 7%. Academic and classroom instruction is the predominant strategy used by these programs at 31% of the total, followed by career and workplace learning strategies at 12% and modeling/mentoring/coaching at 10%.

Despite the critical role that parents and families and schools were perceived as playing in the development of the targeted behaviors, skills and traits, few strategies involved them.

3: *Which of the targeted behaviors, skills, and traits are being addressed by these programs?*

All of the targeted behaviors, skills and traits were reported as being addressed by a majority of these resources, with the top two identified as “respect of self and others” and “communication.” The remaining behaviors, skills, and traits were being addressed by no fewer than 57% of the programs involved in the study.

4: *How effective are these programs as viewed by the entities that provide them and how is effectiveness being measured?*

Although 82% of the programs represented in this study described their efforts as effective or very effective, no assessment information was available for one-half of the programs in this study. Of those programs that did use program assessment tools, about one-half measured changes in behavior and an additional one-third measured changes in learning. Very few, if any, of the

assessments identified in this study held the potential for adoption as a county-wide measurement tool.

There was evidence that the use of assessment measures was associated with program effectiveness. Of the respondents that indicated their programs were “very effective,” 86% used some type of program assessment. Conversely, only 13% of the respondents that identified their program as “somewhat effective” used a program assessment.

5: What gaps in service currently exist?

Although the programs described in the study represented a 24% response rate, the data were insufficient to definitively determine potential service gaps. However, the highly targeted or categorical nature of many youth-serving resources was evident, suggesting that programs serving the “middle 50%” of Will County youth were comparatively few. The other key finding was that additional funding and resources were needed to expand program availability to all Will County youth in need of these supports as well as to support to parents and families.

Recommendations

1. Develop a structure for coordinating youth-serving resources in Will County. Such a mechanism could communicate the array of resources available to youth and the resources that serve them, provide the basis for connecting resources that have common delivery strategies or targeted populations, and build a network to provide technical assistance.
2. Build both awareness and capacity within Will County youth-serving organizations regarding the importance of measuring program effectiveness. Such an initiative could have four phases:
 - a. *Making the Case*. Presenting the current situation, its implications for the community, and potential solutions to stakeholders throughout Will County.
 - b. *Developing the Metrics*. Developing a practical set of common metrics to measure the effectiveness of Will County youth-serving programs can be undertaken as a county-wide enterprise.
 - c. *Building Provider Capacity*. Providing technical assistance and support to measure progress toward the common set of metrics.
 - d. *Reporting the Information*. Regularly collecting, analyzing, and publicizing the results of the new data collection system to demonstrate its value-add to the county.
3. Support a parent and family engagement initiative. Components could include:
 - raise awareness of the *Will County Cares* youth behaviors, skills, and traits and the critical role that families play in building them.
 - provide parents and families with practical tools and tips for supporting their children,
 - work with youth resource providers to encourage their dissemination of the practical tools and tips and to build parent and family involvement components into their offerings.