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**A PUBLIC TEAM MINISTRY
FOR TEEN MOTHERS AND THEIR BABIES**

Introduction

In the past decade, demand for inter-organizational cooperation to solve complex social problems has escalated dramatically. Faith-based organizations are emerging as significant voices in these wider multi-sector partnerships. Strategies and tactics involved in building alliance across group and organizational differences can be challenges for faith-based organizations new to collaborative efforts. This article examines the organizational capacity, performance, and perception of the social impact upon organizations in which four sectors (faith-based, nonprofit, public, and private) interact in providing a home for teenage mothers and their babies. Although there are multiple ways to address this need, the writer highlights one process. Major findings reveal that the four sectors have differing organizational capacity, performance, and perceptions of social impact. Results also indicate that participants are committed to similar core beliefs and values that allow elastic strategies for collaboration.

The group home described is for unwed teenage mothers who are wards of the state. It became operational in 1999 after nearly five years of planning and development. A close examination of this process can assist faith-based organizations and others to think systematically about creating, building, and managing such partnerships, generating value for both the partners of the collaboration and society.

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The account is presented in five parts. Part one investigates relationships among collaboration members through examination of its social purpose. Part two examines clarity of purpose to categorize and describe characteristics. Part three examines congruency of mission and strategies. Core values and beliefs are compared and contrasted in part four as well as communication between partners. Part five examines collaboration resources, dynamics, and commitment.

Part 1

The Need: Connection with Purpose and People

In the late 1980s, Georgia Family and Child Services, responsible for planning and research, became concerned that Georgia was number six in the nation in teen pregnancy,¹ with more than 7,000 girls under eighteen giving birth every year.² Georgia also has one of the nation's highest birth rates of teens ages ten-fourteen,³ and 76 percent of these are unmarried—a rate that has doubled in one generation.⁴ Half of all girls who become pregnant as teenagers become so again within two years.⁵

About this same time, the Christian Council of Churches met in Atlanta to discuss issues related to teen pregnancy. Problems identified include:

¹Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health, Epidemiology and Prevention Branch. "Selected Natality Vital Statistics by Race, Georgia, 1997." (Atlanta: The Department, accessed 1 November 2000); available from <http://www.ph.dhr.state.ga.us/epi/birthdeath/state-birthdeath.PDF>; Internet. *Editor's note:* This URL changed in 2001.

²Ibid.

³Georgia Department of Human Resources Fact Sheet. "Births to Teenagers in Georgia, 1999." (Atlanta: The Department, accessed 1 November 2000); available from <http://www.health.state.ga.us/programs/women/fact-sheets.htm>; Internet. *Editor's note:* This URL changed in 2000.

⁴Annie E. Casey Foundation, "When Teens Have Sex: Issues and Trends, A Kids Count Special Report, 1996." (Baltimore: The Foundation, accessed 1 November 2000); available from <http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/teens/index.html>; Internet.

⁵Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health, 1997.

- Teen mothers are likely to face a life of poverty; in 1993, 55 percent of women on welfare in Georgia reported having their first child as a teenager.⁶
- Teen mothers are less likely to complete high school than women who delay childbearing; only one-third of teen mothers nationwide receive a high school diploma by the time they reach age thirty.⁷
- Teen mothers are likely to become long-term welfare recipients; 53 percent of the costs of welfare, food stamps, and Medicaid are attributable to households begun by teens.⁸

Births to teen mothers perpetuate the cycle of dependence: their children have lower birth weights,⁹ are more likely to perform poorly in school,¹⁰ and are at greater risk of abuse,¹¹ sons are 13 percent more likely to end up in prison, and daughters are 22 percent more likely to become teen mothers themselves.¹²

At the Christian Council of Churches meeting, a national nonprofit (NN) was asked to participate in discussions, represented by their southeast regional director. NN was invited as a national Christian organization with a history of assessing of teen needs.

⁶Georgia Department of Resources, Fact Sheet, 1999.

⁷Rebecca A. Maynard, "The Costs of Adolescent Childbearing," in *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy*, ed. Rebecca A. Maynard (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press, 1997), chap. 10, [285]-335.

⁸University of Georgia, School of Social Work, "The Remaining TANF Recipients: A Research-Based Profile" (Athens, GA: School of Social Work, 1999), summary statement by this writer.

⁹Barbara Wolfe and Maria Perozek, "Teen Children's Health and Health Care Use," in *Kids Having Kids*, chap. 6, [181]-203.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Robert M. Goerge and Bong Joo Lee, "Abuse and Neglect of the Children," in *Kids Having Kids*, chap. 7, [205]-230.

¹²Robert Haverman, Barbara Wolfe, and Elaine Peterson, "Children of Early Childbearers As Young Adults" in *Kids Having Kids*, chap. 9, [257]-284.

Prior to 1988, social service delivery programs in Georgia, providing care for young mothers and their babies, did not offer them housing. What is their reality? Housing options for teen mothers in Georgia are extremely limited. Prior to 2000, Georgia law required teens under eighteen who receive welfare to live at home or with an adult guardian. Yet, for teens whose homes are unsafe or unstable, the state offered no publicly funded alternative. The Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS) does not guarantee that teen mothers in foster care can remain with their babies, and, in fact, these young families are often separated when the parent is taken into protective custody. Homeless shelters, battered women's shelters, and transitional living facilities usually cannot accept teen parents under seventeen. In Georgia, only two homes with fifteen beds served teen mothers under age seventeen who could live with their parents. In early 1997 the beds were full; the state had a waiting list. NN's southeast regional director brought these issues to the regional board and formed an Advisory Committee to review and make recommendations how to address the concerns.

NN is organized by regions with "cells." Each operates with its own self-determined focus, priorities, and financial resources and is managed by an efficient system of volunteers. One of NN's staff persons responsible for developing teen functions at an urban housing development and local high school became interested in housing issues for teen mothers and their babies. A core value of the NN organization is to identify with as many teens as possible. Collaborative networks to accomplish goals is a second essential value. The staff person began a program of long-term care for both teens and their babies, including state welfare agencies, local churches, and other interested groups.

At this beginning stage, no model was in place in the southeast. Without a prototype, the advisory board spent nearly two

years designing a program to include a wide range of state, federal, local, nonprofit, and church groups. Although there were areas of dissension, all were deeply committed to serve the needs of these teens. Soon it became apparent that to move forward to actual development, a full-time leader was needed. NN's national headquarters strongly recommended that the advisory board identify this person. One of the board's members was chosen.

NN initiated a strategic plan to develop a long-term facility for teen mothers and their babies. A separate 501c3 nonprofit organization was formed under the umbrella of the larger parent organization but was required to follow the same funding specifications. This entailed being responsible for all operating funds, not incur any debt, and not receive funds from the parent organization. From its beginning, the new teen program 501c3 organization was an all-volunteer arrangement with the board of directors having experience in working with teen pregnancies of the urban poor.

Part 2

The Concept: Clarity of Purpose

Legal structure of state foster care is a problem—mothers and babies are not able to live in same place since homes for both young mothers and their babies are not provided. NN was committed to reducing teen pregnancies among this vulnerable population but its organizational structure was an impediment to this development. First, there was no organizational history for such a program. Secondly, this design required full-time management rather than volunteers. Thirdly, because of NN's "cell" structure, the Teen Pregnancy Committee functioned as a cell with its own advisory board but was not viewed as just another cell activity within NN's southeast regional activities by NN's board.

This Committee, however, chose the full-time director from among its own ranks.

The new director soon discovered that there were no regulations for this type of group home in the state. A proposal on the operation of the program needed to be submitted. While waiting for this to be developed, the group home obtained an exempt status from the state to operate without a license for four girls, not counting the babies. In 1994, NN decided to open a group home upon recommendation of their Teen Pregnancy Advisory Board. This was to be established for homeless mothers less than seventeen and their infants and was licensed by the state as a pilot project by the State Department of Human Resources, Office of Regulatory Services, and the Department of Family and Children Services. The project provided a therapeutic setting to low-income, socially disadvantaged teen mothers and their infants where they could experience a quality home life and grow mentally, physically, and spiritually. The goal was to assist them in postponing second pregnancies until certain life goals were fulfilled: completion of a high school education or obtaining a GED, acquisition of parenting skills, and developing social skills necessary to make informed decisions.

In 1998, a home was identified as a possible facility in College Park, Georgia. College Park, however, would not approve the opening because of its moratorium on group homes—only accepting such homes for the disabled due to federal law requirements. The director obtained a “disabled status” from county officials for the girls under a designation of mental illness. The mayor was upset by this maneuver around the moratorium, but the house could now exist. With the house located and rented, a new problem arose with DFACS. This agency would not license the facility because of its exempt status. The director had to return to regulatory services, writing policies and procedures to

meet DFACS' standards. In July 1999, the group home was licensed and opened its doors to residents in August 1999.

Part 3

The Conflict: Congruency of Mission and Strategy

After the Teen Pregnancy Committee within NN obtained a full-time executive director for the group home, a name was created for the project; for the purposes of this study it is identified as WYM. This name represented a core value of the NN organization—collaboration. But whereas there was agreement among advisory board members and the executive director for collaboration, it became apparent that persons involved in this program had different definitions of collaboration.

Because WYM was under the auspices of NN, it was required to follow this operational structure. Problems emerged from the beginning because of NN's self-supporting policy for each of its activities. NN could not pay the director's salary but agreed to assist both this person and the NN teen pregnancy cell leader to identify potential financial supporters. This leader agreed to raise funds for the director's salary and quickly did so. The director focused on becoming licensed and locating a house, thinking that WYM was collaborating with NN for funding. The cell leader felt that WYM needed to collaborate with many organizations to disperse the workload and financial responsibilities.

About the same time a home for the teen girls was established, expenses for WYM greatly increased. The executive director located an office near the potential group home and hired a secretary. Neither she nor the WYM Advisory Board was involved in raising the needed funds to operate the new office and staff salaries.

The WYM Board of Directors (previously the Advisory

Board) was comprised of people aware of urban/poor teenage pregnancy or were personal friends of the executive director, sharing her strong commitment to this issue. A smaller portion of the board was comprised of persons who were familiar with and supportive of NN's organizational and collaborative structure.

The executive director was not accountable to the WYM board of directors, primarily because of friendships and the board's lack of professional sophistication. Conflicting "perspectives" polarized the board: providing immediate assistance for the girls or seeking a range of support services through collaborations at a later date. An additional conflicting viewpoint related to organizational structure and funding: Should the group home seek funding through collaborative support or the public sector?

The executive director led the hostility against NN because "NN keeps telling us what to do." The previous cell leader said, "This is a NN activity; we must follow their organizational structure." At the regional NN board level, it was determined that WYM must function as all other activities within NN structure and be self-supporting. NN recognized that WYM must be self-sustaining but also recognized that no one seemed capable of "stepping up" to the financial responsibilities. The WYM board was all volunteers having responsibilities beyond this unit, and the executive director did not have any expertise with raising funds; however, she did have experience in writing grants. NN agreed to allow WYM operational cost deficits for three months because they were committed to the WYM project.

Meanwhile, the executive director and the original NN cell leader, now the WYM Board Chair, were having violent interactions at board meetings regarding operations. The conflicts resulted from a combination of factors related to age differences, different visions regarding program implementation, funding, and

financial responsibilities. Another area related to the physical repairs required for licensing. This was a responsibility of the executive director, but her lack of experience in construction project management added costs and delay to open the home.

In November 1998, NN officers attended the WYM board meeting and were shocked at the dissension. NN had over \$50,000 in costs for which they were responsible and were unwilling to assume additional expenses in light of the extreme hostility among leaders of WYM. The WYM board was instructed to raise their own funding or the project would have to be terminated. The executive director was shocked with the NN officer's response. The WYM board chair resigned from both groups because the conflict with the executive director had become so personal. Would the group home ever be developed?

One member of the WYM board was an associate minister at a large suburban church and desired to develop a strategic planning component in their mission's area. The WYM board strongly supported this. The member contacted a member of the Missions Committee at the church and asked him to function as board chair. He had substantial financial experience and access to a wide array of skilled managers to assist in getting the project "up and running."

The new board chair became the driving force behind solving each of the dilemmas faced by WYM, guiding the board into a strategic plan with a long-term relationship with the suburban church. The church quickly raised \$85,000 to complete the home renovations, hire appropriate staff, and provide a project manager to oversee the completion of required renovations, as well as furnishings. The state had become seriously concerned with the home's financial viability; but because of the significant financial background of the board chair and influx of financial support from the suburban church, licensing was approved.

Part 4**The Structure: Role of Core Values and Beliefs**

When the new WYM board chair came into office, the first order of business was to stop the dissension and get the board focused on opening the group home. Although the board director who introduced the new board chair had to resign, the rest of the board liked him and agreed to elect him as chair.

This new chair had been looking for ways to be involved in a social outreach that used his professional skills and personal strengths. WYM provided such an avenue. When he encountered WYM for the first time, it was in chaos, but he felt that the elements for success were in place for opening the first home. A fresh personality with credibility was required. Both organizations found him steadfast in adversity, consistent, empathetic, and completion oriented, bringing business planning skills as well as being able to "manage in ambiguity."

The immediate crises related to leadership and finances. The executive director was now willing to cooperate with the new chair. But the financial burden threatened to close the project immediately. The director, inexperienced in managing a renovation project and emotionally raw from the previous board conflicts, needed encouragement to refocus on opening a group home. In addition, NN had to bring closure to their financial commitment.

Although NN didn't want to bring closure to the project, they had close to \$50,000 in expenses. Meanwhile, the executive director claimed, "We are within days of opening." This proved to be unrealistic; she had no idea of construction timing or costs. NN closed her office and fired her secretary, unwilling to incur these additional expenses. The new board chair suggested obtaining an office in the church across the street from

the group home, recommending that the executive director and board think of a "collaboration portfolio." The board decided to support this concept and agreed to seek organizations to whom WYM could be introduced; supporters emerged from this collaborative focus.

Communication Between Partners

Good communication is essential to building trust. The lines of communication between WYM and NN and within the WYM advisory board were fractured: differing perspectives about organizational structure, management design, vision, planning, operations, and financial accountability. The executive director had been reluctant to form a separate 501c3 from NN, but the state would not fund any portion of the program without a separate nonprofit organization specific to the teen program. The new board chair focused on getting the home operational with basic funding in place and to establish 501c3 status. He contacted a national law firm with a reputation for community involvement. Twelve lawyers responded. One, a partner at the firm, agreed to come onto the board and to oversee formation of the 501c3 corporation. NN also agreed to help fund WYM to a limit and signed a note to pay nearly \$50,000 in WYM organizational costs with the understanding that WYM would repay the debt when possible. The board began a program of strategic planning to identify organizations as possible long-term collaborative partners.

Part 5

The Implementation: Collaboration Resources

The chair led a long-range board development plan in developing collaborative partners. Although the board responded pos-

itively, the actual results were mixed. In addition to building a collaborative portfolio with organizations to develop long-range strategic plans related to funding, the board desired to create collaborative relationships to provide cost savings to WYM operational costs.

WYM continued to desire a collaborative relationship with NN and vice versa. After a home had been located, NN agreed to lease it in their name with a verbal understanding that WYM would purchase the home at a later date; WYM would be responsible for the lease payments. This home was owned by a former Catholic seminarian who desired to help due to personal religious convictions, and that home was viewed as a faith-based organization. The church, located across the street, agreed to lease office space and to provide janitorial services indefinitely.

A strength of the board was addressing the need of teen mothers and their children while a weakness was the lack of sophistication regarding fiduciary matters and a process for building organizational capacity. The executive director, experienced in writing grants, and seeking only federal and state funding, was not motivated to understand the importance of building collaborative partners. Approximately half of the remaining board members understood the importance of collaborative partners and actively wanted to engage this process. The remaining half either had no understanding or resources with which to build such relationships. As a result, several board members resigned. Their replacements proved difficult because of the smallness of the organization.

Although the board was fewer in number, it was now more organized, structured, and with less conflict. It prepared to renovate the house to meet state regulations, hire staff, and identify girls to live there. The executive director began seeking grants to open the house and had some success as a fundraiser. This

was a new experience for her; she began to understand her role related to fund raising.

The house opened in late summer but a bureaucratic morass now emerged: funding pressures, state licensing issues, and rules and regulations regarding childcare. HUD helped WYM obtain a Community Development Block Grant of \$335,000 to purchase the home for \$315,000 with \$20,000 for repairs and maintenance. WYM viewed this as a wonderful collaboration. As the home neared opening, however, it was clear that nearly \$100,000 would be needed to begin operations: staff, furniture and equipment, and utilities. The board chair contacted his church, which had recently committed to give 10 percent of the funds raised for its building fund to local missions. WYM became the program to support. Women's church circles raised funds to decorate the four bedrooms; another church member agreed to act as renovation supervisor; and several Sunday school classes asked to participate in the renovations.

Commitment to the Collaboration

Because partnerships increase in scope, scale, strategic importance, and operational complexity as they advance through collaborative relationships, partners must be prepared to ratchet up their personal, institutional, and resource commitments accordingly. A strategic alliance requires a deep relationship, not a deal; partners need to take long-term perspectives. Short-term alliances are useful but tend to be more tactical than strategic.

WYM at the close of this study was at a crucial point in its ongoing life. Although the board had committed to a long-range plan of building a collaborative portfolio, none of the collaborations in which WYM had engaged over the past two years had begun to evolve from tactical to strategic. They were primarily

short-term alliances, although two of the public sector ones wished to be more strategic but were not in a position to commit public funds to this type of strategy. Two alliances discontinued the relationship with WYM because this organization did not meet their long-term goals. WYM was lurching from one small funding source to the next, never obtaining a sense of stability. The board, reviewing WYM's core values, looked for ways to maintain them in the face of the realities of nonprofit funding in the U.S.

A follow-up meeting was held with the chair and executive director six months after the study was completed and made available to the board of directors of WYM. Significant changes in the overall operations had occurred. The board had contacted an organization of community development consultants to provide a long-term strategic plan for the home at no cost. They recommended WYM become a part of the recently developed network of residential programs for teen mothers in Georgia. This partnering provided oversight, advocacy, and networks for WYM and qualified them to receive federal funds to cover operational costs. They also recommended WYM broaden their constituency funding opportunities to include more private grants. Additional recommendations included realigning the board of directors to focus on policy development, funding, and financial governance; reviewing and modifying responsibilities of the executive director; developing organizational goals; improving operational efficiency; and improving effectiveness of WYM's mission with greater community involvement. All these recommendations are being implemented.

Conclusion

There are numerous findings in this study which might be useful to faith-based organizations in the process of creating a

public ministry. These include:

- “Faith” is a significant factor and motivation for participation in a collaborative effort with a faith-based organization.
- Private sector organizations found the “faith” factor provides an entrée for their involvement with a faith-based organization’s collaborative effort.
- There is a difference in the attitudes of experienced organizations and the faith-based organization as a result of participating in a faith-based collaborative effort. Specifically, respondents from the private and nonprofit sectors indicated they wanted increased levels of collaboration, and respondents from the public sector wanted to participate in a collaborative effort with the faith-based organization at a moderate level.
- There are several deterrents that impact organizations involved in the collaborative effort with a faith-based one. Among these are lack of sophistication regarding strategic planning, absence of previous collaboration experience among partners, and the need of organizational capacity of the faith-based organization.
- A paradox exists between private, public, and nonprofit-sector organizations interested in collaborative projects with the faith-based sector. Private, public, and nonprofit-sector agencies are willing to work with faith-based organizations; however, a lack of experienced management in the faith-based sector prohibits effective collaborative efforts.
- There is not an efficient linkage between the resources of the private, public, and nonprofit sector agencies and faith-based organizations.

- There are several skills identified as needs for senior management implementing a collaborative effort with a faith-based organization. These include but are not limited to knowledge of the alliance's social purpose and with each other, engagement of and relationships between top leaders, creating opportunities for interaction and service engagement at all levels of the organizations involved, and mobilizing and combining multiple resources and capabilities.
- There are several skills identified as needed for managers of faith-based organizations, including, but not limited to, knowledge of the means to improve organizational capacity, adaptive capacity to support learning, and the means to support and demand program assessment and evaluation.



