



**YMCA of Greater Vancouver
and the United Way of the Lower Mainland**

School-Aged Child Care: Needs & Alternatives

Feasibility Study Report 2009

Executive Summary

FINAL



YMCA/United Way Feasibility Study Report
George E. Rodger – July 29, 2009



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The YMCA of Greater Vancouver (YMCA) and the United Way are deeply invested in providing services that support the healthy development of children in our community. Research shows that the ability to provide a safe, developmentally stimulating, exciting and popular program for children in their middle years is almost unanimously seen as a massive challenge facing the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The resulting gaps in service make middle years children vulnerable to numerous influences that pose serious risks to their health and wellbeing. Responding to the challenge, the YMCA and the United Way designed a pilot project (*School's Out*) and two potential community response models for feasibility testing and engaged George E. Rodger to conduct the study.

The objectives of the feasibility study were to determine:

- Stakeholder perceptions of the severity of the middle years problem.
- The perception of the YMCA being the leader in solving the problem.
- The viability of the program pilot model.
- The legitimacy of early budget models.
- The preference for a YMCA-alone model versus a YMCA-led community capacity-building model.
- The potential availability of significant levels of financial support for the program.
- The identification of any significant concerns or special conditions that might need to be met before the program can be successfully launched.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The data for this study was gathered by interviewing individuals identified (by YMCA senior staff and senior volunteers in consultation with the United Way) as local community leaders, potential donors, potential partners and ordinary citizens. The consultant conducted 37 face to face interviews with 42 individuals and three focus groups involving 62 individuals. Prior to attending the interview, each respondent was provided with an executive summary of research conducted by the YMCA and United Way defining the middle years problem. In addition, materials were prepared to review the research and response models prior to the interview process.

THE ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS

Interview responses revealed a widespread acknowledgement that existing gaps in service to middle years children is a universal community problem on par with homelessness, addiction and gangs. However, as it focuses on prevention rather than a “cure”, it does not have the same fundraising appeal as health-related causes.

The program model presented by the YMCA was seen as a very practical, easy to understand and effective solution to the overall problem with some concerns raised over affordability and accessibility for vulnerable communities, attendance management and whether or not service should be provided year round rather than just during the school term. Although interviewees expressed an overall preference for the community capacity-

building model, almost everyone interviewed agreed that the successful completion of a pilot project was needed to test program elements.

Most interviewees agreed that the YMCA is a natural and logical leader for this issue but all were concerned about the approach the YMCA would use so as not to threaten the smaller organizations who believe they have current ownership of this kind of after-school program. Interviewees cautioned the YMCA to really take the time necessary to build trust and true collaboration. Many community partners were identified as potential contributors to a successful program.

Although there was general agreement that the YMCA has the capacity to raise between \$2 million and \$4 million to cover the proposed budget for the first three years of operations, the ability to secure core government funding was identified as one of the most critical factors in determining the long-term viability of the *School's Out* program. Discussions also focused on a number of uncertainties that could make the program much more costly and concerns were raised regarding the impact this might have on the YMCA's financial stability and reputation.

When asked about financial support, everyone agreed that this is an important enough problem that they would help in some way. Four major gifts (\$100,000 or more) were identified and at least 14 other large donations were identified.

BIG AND CONFLICTING THEMES

A number of conflicting themes emerged from the interviews conducted:

- This is a critical problem that could affect an entire generation, but is challenging from a fundraising and program delivery point of view.
- It will be relatively easy to meet budget requirements in the first three years of operation, but there is a great deal of uncertainty about the sustainability of such a program.
- Research reports that there are significant gaps in service for middle years children, but with many small organizations doing bits and pieces of work with this issue it is difficult to consolidate efforts in a meaningful way.
- Core government funding is required to ensure the sustainability of program, but with the recession now is not the time to approach government for funding.

SUCCESS FACTORS

In summarizing the data from the interviews, five success factors were identified as being critical to the viability of the program including the completion of a successful pilot program (fall 2009), having the United Way sign on as an operating partner, achieving a sufficient level of core government funding, establishing an effective funds development model to ensure donor support and the sharing of inspiring stories to communicate the value of the program to community stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on research findings and information gathered from community stakeholders, consultant George E. Rodger put forward a number of recommendations to the YMCA. First and foremost was the recommendation that the YMCA conduct an extensive internal discussion to “vision” its response to the middle years opportunity. Five possible responses were identified by the consultant:

1. Simply publish and publicly present the research and feasibility results.
2. Execute the pilot in addition to presenting the research and feasibility study results.
3. Publish and present the research and then hold stakeholder discussions with potential partners, funders and sponsors to determine if a collaborative, larger, quicker, capacity-building model will work.
4. In addition to publishing the research, agree to operate the six “YMCA-alone” sites and review the program in three years.
5. Move forward with the 18-site community capacity-building model of early delivery and take the lead on the issue and manage the response.

Additional Recommendations:

- Final destination and all phases of program development need to be mapped out in order to plan for appropriate communication to funders, partners and implementation of the initiative.
- Proceed with a single-site pilot project in the winter of 2010. Consider locating the pilot site(s) in Burnaby or Surrey to avoid potential problems in the City of Vancouver.
- Create a senior staff-led steering committee to support the ongoing work of the initiative.
- Formally ask the YMCA of Greater Vancouver Endowment Fund to be a major funder of the pilot project.
- Host a public presentation (with United Way) of the research and feasibility study findings.
- Establish a joint United Way/YMCA steering committee to manage collaboration process.
- If the collaborative capacity-building model is chosen, create an Agency Council or Steering Committee.
- Once the visioning process is complete, establish an influential council of advisors to champion the initiative.
- Ensure thorough internal YMCA communications planning to report on progress of the initiative (particularly from a funds development and government relations perspective).
- Continue discussions with school districts/provincial government on relevant issues.
- Create a marketing and communications plan to support program objectives.
- Determine budgetary responsibility for every phase of the program.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The YMCA's *Middle Childhood: School's Out Feasibility Study* has shown that there is a great deal of consensus among stakeholders in the Lower Mainland that serious gaps in service exist for middle years children (particularly those in vulnerable communities) and that quick action must be taken to develop programming that meets the needs of these children to enable them to become well adjusted, contributing members of our community.

Given the strong support voiced for the YMCA to lead on this issue and enthusiasm for the capacity-building model of program implementation, the next step for the YMCA is to determine which program model will be most viable from an operational point of view and to what extent they wish to lead on this important issue. As numerous stakeholders stated during the interview sessions, "This might be the defining community problem for this generation of leaders and for this age group of children. Do something big, but do it very carefully!"