

VESPER SOCIETY
FINAL EVALUATION
YOUTH INTERVENTION NETWORK, ANTIOCH, CALIFORNIA
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NOVEMBER 2009

We are succeeding with the YIN project, and the DPC is the heart of this body.”

YIN Collaborator

INTRODUCTION

Since 2005, Vesper Society has supported the training for individual leaders of Oikosnet Centers in the methodology of Dialogue for Peaceful Change (DPC). This program, developed in Northern Ireland by Colin Craig, has proven to provide leaders with new skills to manage conflict in their social justice work.

The application of DPC was greatly expanded when the Youth Intervention Network (YIN) in Antioch, California, asked Vesper Society to bring this methodology to its newly formed collaboration. The purpose of YIN is addressing youth violence in their community. The experience of the YIN leadership is that such collaborative efforts often fail because of the natural rivalries between various agencies and interest groups. These leaders were looking for a methodology that would allow this newly formed collaboration “to do it differently.”

Vesper Society agreed to contract for the services of Colin Craig to provide the primary leadership for TIDES DPC trainings for the key partners in the YIN collaboration. These trainings were conducted in 2008 and 2009. This evaluation is a report that analyses the effectiveness of the DPC trainings on the operation and success of the YIN collaboration. Specifically, this evaluation consists of three sections:

- Key findings – DPC’s impact on YIN
- Conclusions
- Recommendations

As shown below, the impact of DPC has been instrumental in the success and sustainability of YIN. The DPC method was first introduced as a tool that would support the collaborative to identify and address conflict. What happened next was a discovery of the essential values and uniqueness of the DPC methodology. As a result, YIN embraced the DPC method as an invaluable tool and practice that enhanced trust in the projects' viability. In addition, stakeholders remarked how the DPC motivated them to overcome conflictive challenges, revise plans to make DPC central in their work with families, and strengthen their unwavering pursuit of social change in Antioch. Successes catapulted YIN into a broader landscape; other cities noticed and inquired.

KEY FINDINGS: DPC'S IMPACT ON YIN

"I don't think YIN would be where it is today without the DPC's trainings and practice."

YIN Collaborator

The impact that the DPC model had and continues to have with YIN is significant and transformative in three equally important ways. This segment on key findings also provides insight into some remaining challenges.

Key findings show the value of the DPC in:

- Empowering families
- Building trust and confidence among YIN's collaborators
- Spreading widely and attracting attention of communities beyond Antioch

Empowering families - Enhancing the capacity of families to identify and address pressing issues:

The DPC model transformed YIN's framework/methodology. YIN's stakeholders observed the power of DPC and determined that the way to effective and productive work with youth and their families is to employ the DPC from the start. This new perspective means that the DPC model is used as a tool as soon as a mediator or facilitator starts to work with a family. This method empowers youth and families, giving them opportunities to identify their core issues and address them. It is important to note that this is not how YIN was originally conceived. Rather, this is one of the key ways in which DPC impacted and transformed YIN's practices. The fact that YIN adopted the DPC method in this manner was an unexpected result for the collaborative.

Building trust and confidence: For YIN's members (leaders, collaborators, mediators and advocates), DPC went from being a supportive tool to becoming an essential component of their joint endeavor. In essence, DPC enabled these individuals and organizations to work

collaboratively, and it infused a sustained level of enthusiasm about the project. According to those interviewed for this set of evaluations, their enthusiasm stems from a belief that conflict can be overcome with the use of DPC practices. As a result, YIN is able to continue on its path, towards tangible and positive results. YIN members acknowledge that conflict has occurred in the past; they also know that similar challenges may ensue in the future. However, these individuals remain confident that the DPC will allow them to navigate and resolve conflict again.

Spreading widely and attracting attention of communities beyond Antioch: The majority of people interviewed for this set of evaluations expressed an interest in seeing greater numbers of individuals accessing and participating in DPC trainings -they envision greater numbers of community members benefitting from, and spreading the DPC method throughout Antioch. These reflections arise from their experience with the model, and their belief that the greater number of people who are trained in the DPC model, the greater the chances for positive change in a community. In the view of most interviewees, the DPC became central to YIN. They further indicate that it is through the DPC that YIN is sustainable and successful.

Moreover, as a byproduct of this local success, YIN has attracted the attention of communities outside of Antioch. Specifically, other cities in California have inquired about, and shown interest in the YIN approach.

Remaining challenges, issues that the DPC methodology may not have addressed: A couple of YIN stakeholders indicated that some deep-seeded intra-organizational issues had been hard to overcome, resulting in ongoing tension and precluding advancement to some extent. They saw these as lingering issues that require in-depth attention. However, these interviewees spoke highly of the DPC method, asserting that they still believe in its capacity to create change when confronting conflict -they remain optimistic about the future. Furthermore, these individuals indicated that they were putting the DPC methodology to effective use in other settings. In doing so, they recognized the value that the method adds not only to YIN, but to a broader spectrum of settings.

CONCLUSIONS

“The DPC helps to create an environment in which a community can and will deal with issues.”

YIN mediator

DPC paves the way to results: While conflict occurred and may continue to be experienced within YIN, the DPC will more than likely continue to move the effort forward. Many collaborators indicated that if/when conflict emerges, their DPC training and insights enable

them to act on this early on, addressing the issue, dissolving tensions, and staying focused on the project's goals.

In essence:

“The DPC makes you feel prepared and supported to move forward with confidence.”

YIN mediator

DPC is central to YIN's success: The significance of the DPC model within YIN is evident as it became central to the project and the families benefitting from the effort; this is not how the project had been originally conceived. Rather, it was an unexpected development that ensued from the experience gained by YIN collaborators with the DPC method. Through a process of learning and discovery, YIN's stakeholders realized that the DPC was unique and critical, and as such, they fully embraced it.

DPC beyond Antioch: The DPC model has the potential to become essential for other community efforts/collaborations in California as a result of the positive role it is playing in Antioch.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Four specific recommendations emanate from the information gathered via interviews with stakeholders and the analysis of the two previous YIN-DPC reports (Initial Evaluation, August 2008; Mid-Point Evaluation, June 2009). These four recommendations center on expanding DPC trainings, and continuing efforts to benefit from lessons learned through the YIN-DPC project.

Expanding DPC trainings: Antioch and beyond

“The potential is great. I see creating a corps of DPC trainers in Antioch.”

YIN leader

- Explore ways to provide DPC trainings to other community members in Antioch –the interest and enthusiasms are spreading, and the conditions appear to be favorable for an even greater presence/role for the DPC within that community.
- YIN was approached by the State of California to potentially replicate its strategies elsewhere. According to YIN's leaders, the DPC would be instrumental in any replication efforts. In essence, the DPC could be equally valuable in communities

(beyond Antioch) that decide to embark on YIN-types of efforts/replicate YIN. Therefore, ensure that the DPC model has visibility in geographic regions showing an interest in YIN.

Lessons learned: Antioch and beyond

- Continue to seek feedback from YIN's stakeholders because there may be other ways in which the DPC impacts the collaboration as time progresses. It will be beneficial to know about such developments for future DPC projects. Keep records of these lessons learned as appropriate.
- If YIN is replicated elsewhere, and the DPC is incorporated, provide the new community/collaborative with a summary of lessons learned regarding the DPC's instrumental role in supporting and transforming the effort in Antioch. In doing so, other communities will have the advantage to plan and design their projects with this knowledge on hand, and from the start.

Finally, this report shows that excitement about the DPC's proven effectiveness prevails among YIN's members. These stakeholders assert that their vision for social justice in Antioch is strong and viable. Based on interviewees' comments, it is clear that the DPC method brings two distinguishing and valuable contributions to the table:

- 1 DPC helps to overcome obstacles, namely conflict, within the context of elaborate, multi-organizational endeavors, and
- 2 The DPC method acts as coalescing force, enabling groups to stay together and focused on their vision and goals.

The energy and enthusiasm about YIN and DPC has helped to create and sustain a group of individuals and organizations committed to social justice and positive change in Antioch. In their experience, interviewees have already witnessed changes among YIN participating families *—for example, parents and their youth are now addressing long-term critical issues and deciding to do something about them; while youth are improving on their school grades, and walking away from formerly disruptive behaviors.*

In sum, and based on current successes, the future of this endeavor signals more positive community change to come. Again, the DPC is at the core of these accomplishments.