MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR BAY AREA YOUTH
Youth Development Grants: 2008–2015

S. D. BECHTEL, JR.
FOUNDATION
STEPHEN BECHTEL FUND

Highlights drawn from a retrospective report prepared spring 2016 by independent consultant Jill Blair. Report sources included analysis of grant data as well as interviews with grantees and Foundation staff.

THE FOUNDATION'S APPROACH

The S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation supported a range of grantee needs within its Bay Area Youth Development portfolio, including training programs for paid staff and volunteers, strategic planning, data collection, capacity building, and operating infrastructure. In addition, 19 organizations received capital project grants. All investments aimed to help grantees improve their organizational effectiveness and ability to deliver high-quality programs to youth. In many cases, Foundation support focused on the value of *character* in youth development.

While there is variation in how grantees used funds, there is great consistency in how they describe the Foundation itself – as a partner, an advocate, and a compassionate collaborator. Grantees frequently named the following qualities when describing the Foundation's approach:

- **Flexible:** Showing a willingness to accommodate differences and to address grantees' changing needs.
- **Caring:** Respecting, understanding, and responding to the challenges of working with marginalized and hard-to-reach populations.
- **Trusting:** Following the grantee's lead to make the greatest difference through funding.
- **Direct:** Communicating candidly about the Foundation's evolving emphasis on character as well as its spend-down plans.
- **Evolving:** Changing and growing alongside grantees in true partnership.

SNAPSHOT

82 youth development grantees in the San Francisco Bay Area

$26.4 million in grants for programs and operations

$14.6 million in grants for capital projects

CHARACTER IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

All grantees examined the meaning of character in the context of their communities. Grantees reported that they define and experience community through multiple lenses: economic, educational, racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic. In response to the Foundation's emphasis on youth character development, organizations often heightened their examination of the ways young people learn to make choices, and of the pressures they face.

This caused grantees to explore the relationship between circumstance and character – and to consider how these two things influence each other. Organizations described deep questions they faced in the process of focusing on character development; this often included holding challenging discussions with the Foundation and within their organizations regarding cultural values, language, and expectations. These organizations learned that meaning and modeling matter: young people need to understand what character is, and to observe it in the adults around them.

LASTING CHANGE

Five grantees participated in extensive interviews; each reported significant progress. For example:

- **Girls Scouts of Northern California** invented, shared, and employed new methods for reaching marginalized populations, training volunteers, and teaching outer space and science education.
- **The YMCA of San Francisco** adopted a "train the trainer" approach across all branches that is creative, dynamic, effective, and self-sustaining.
- **East Oakland Youth Development Center** embraced "character" as core to its organizational identity. The organization renovated its facility, sharpened its priorities, created a new leadership structure, and developed new, sustainable capacities.
- **Larkin Street** initiated structural and staffing reforms that enable a better connection between data and programs with a focus on improving outcomes for youth.
- **First Place for Youth** improved its use of data while refining and further codifying its model, making it possible to promote its work more broadly and to greater effect.

TAKEAWAYS FOR FUNDERS

This retrospective analysis yielded four key practices for youth development funders:

1 | Create opportunities for grantees to learn together.

A number of grantees regretted not being able to meet with others in the portfolio to share experience and exchange wisdom on common challenges and issues of interest.

2 | Communicate with peer funders.

As the Foundation nears its sunset, grantees identified a need for other funders who understand and support their work in ways consistent with the Foundation's trust-based approach.

3 | Understand the challenges of growth.

Growth requires a long-range view and thoughtful financial planning to ensure that organizations can sustain and support change over time.

4 | Think about succession to ensure lasting success.

Strong leaders don't live or stay forever. It is essential to be mindful of leadership succession, especially when the work is of critical importance to community.

Visit **sdbjrfoundation.org/effectiveness/retrospectives** to read the full report.   NOVEMBER 2017