

# Stand Up for Our Children Year Two Evaluation

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Achieving positive and lasting outcomes for our children is not possible without effective parent engagement.

Research on parent engagement reveals its profound impact on children beginning in early childhood and continuing through their transition to adulthood. Parent engagement increases children's school readiness, strengthens academic performance, and improves social skills and behaviors. Parents benefit by becoming more resilient in how they face stress and crisis, increasing their practical knowledge of parenting and child development, and gaining more confidence about their ability to bring about change in their lives, their family and their community.

Unfortunately in New Orleans, parent engagement has been a challenge. Efforts to cultivate effective parent engagement have not generally recognized how low income, minority and immigrant families are overwhelmed by social stress and the challenge to meet basic economic needs. Additionally, the community-based organizations that serve these families often come ill-equipped, lacking sufficient tools, practices, expertise and resources needed to fully engage parents successfully.

The Stand Up for Our Children initiative was designed to address these dynamics through a focus on increasing parent advocacy for vulnerable children, strengthening the nonprofits which work in our community's distressed neighborhoods by building their capacity to be more successful in serving parents and families, and fostering a collaborative ethos among these organizations to leverage greater impact.

This initiative of the Greater New Orleans Foundation (GNOF) was made possible through a \$1.5 million grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

A fundamental belief of both foundations is that solutions to community problems emanate from local citizens working individually and collectively toward the common good and that people have the inherent capacity to solve their own problems. In that spirit and prior to any grant awards, GNOF led a planning process to identify what things were working well, and determine capacity issues and service gaps of potential grantees. The results from that work helped shape the Stand Up for Our Children initiative to include:

- Use of best practices in parent engagement
- A proactive grantmaking approach blending capacity building with grant investments
- A peer-to-peer learning cohort, a Community of Practice (CoP), as a vehicle for the organizational capacity building, parental engagement and development of a network for change among participants.

The following 12 organizations received grant awards for participation in the initiative:

Birthing Project USA, Delta Region Office	Orleans Public Education Network
City of NOLA Health Department – Healthy Start NOLA	Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast
Kingsley House*	Puentes New Orleans
Louisiana Children’s Museum	Total Community Action
Neighborhood Partnership Network	United Way of Southeast Louisiana
New Orleans Fatherhood Consortium*	Urban League of Greater New Orleans

\*Year 2 grantees

All Stand Up grantees were required to participate in the Community of Practice half-day learning sessions over the course of the initiative. In Year Two, the CoP met five times providing structured professional development experiences about early childhood, parent engagement and organizational capacity practices. These meetings were designed and facilitated by GNOF staff and volunteer CoP members, and over time, grantees took greater ownership in shaping and running the CoP meetings.

The overall Stand Up initiative was managed by a GNOF Design Team led by Joann Ricci, Vice President of Organizational Effectiveness. The team was comprised of Kellie Chavez Greene, Senior Program Officer for Organizational Effectiveness; Flint Mitchell, Program Officer; and Mandi Cambre, Organizational Effectiveness Program Associate. The overall design of the Year Two evaluation was developed in partnership with the Design Team along with input from members of the CoP and the third-party Year Two evaluator, Jeffrey M. Glebocki, Strategy + Action/Philanthropy.

Methodology

The initiative’s Year One evaluation sought to learn about *changes in participants’ awareness, knowledge and acquisition of skills*. The Year Two evaluation looked at *how participants began to apply these knowledge and skills and take action as individuals, organizations and networks*. This evaluation considered the Stand Up initiative’s activities and impact from September 2013 to August 2014.

Data was collected and analyzed through a set of primary methods and engaged significant portions of the initiative’s participants:

Data Collection Method	Number of Participants
Parent Online Survey (and Interview)	47
CoP Online Survey	24 (83% of the CoP cohort of 29)
CoP Focus Groups (2)	19 (66% of the CoP cohort of 29)
Executive Director Focus Group (and Interviews)	9 (75% of the Executive Directors cohort of 12)
Foundation Design Team Focus Group	4 (100% of the Foundation Design Team of four)

Additionally, the evaluator conducted an observation of the CoP's April 2014 meeting, and observed the Foundation Design Team's Year Two planning conference calls. Supplemental data points included a telephone interview with Jitu Brown, National Director of the Journey for Justice Alliance, and CoP presenter on parent engagement; review of CoP meeting evaluations self-reported by participants; and a review of the March 2014 *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* article, "Community Funds Ask People from Diverse Walks of Life for Priorities" which featured the Stand Up initiative.

### Year Two Evaluation Findings

The Stand Up initiative provided a continuum of comprehensive services and support to the participating grantees. These included project and technical assistance grants, professional development training, convening and network building, development of the peer-to-peer Community of Practice, assistance from local and national experts, and cultivation of promising practices in parent engagement.

The Year Two evaluation focused on the following three questions about the impact and activities of the initiative. These questions are followed by the key findings and stories that tell what has changed as a result of Stand Up for Our Children.

#### **Evaluation Question #1: How or to what extent have Stand Up funded organizations increased their capacity to engage parents of children ages 0-5?**

*Problem Statement:* Prior to the Stand Up initiative, the use of promising and/or best practices around parent engagement was generally not common among CoP members. Before participating in Stand Up, these organizations generally did not engage parents as leaders, or they maintained earlier belief systems that viewed the parent as the "client, not a partner." These same organizations also generally did not prioritize building the capacity of parents to take on substantive leadership and advocacy roles in their children's lives.

#### *Key Findings:*

- **All 12 funded nonprofit organizations reported increased capacity to engage parents.** Parent engagement expert, Mr. Jitu Brown, National Director of the Journey for Justice Alliance, and CoP professional development presenter, observed that organizations "often make the mistake of looking at parents as the audience when they should be leaders." His advice has been taken up by the CoP.

One group added parents to their organizational chart, another included parent capacity building in their new strategic plan, and others have changed their staff and volunteer training to better meet parent needs. A CoP executive director noted that "we've seen a change in attitude of front line staff and executive staff (when working with parents)."

CoP member groups have changed how and where they hold parent meetings so they are more convenient and accessible to parents; some are providing daycare and transportation to attract parents; and still others have undertaken intentional outreach to also engage fathers in their work with parents.

- **Stand Up grantees now have increased awareness and knowledge about the value and importance of parent voice.**
- **Funded organizations incorporated best practices in parent engagement – and parents themselves – into their work.**
- **Staff skills needed to implement best practice in parent engagement have been made stronger.**
- **The Stand Up initiative has had a profound impact on the funded organizations’ regarding parent engagement and in the organizations’ culture, policies and practices.**
- **Parent leaders have influenced positive change in their communities.**

**Evaluation Question #2: How or to what extent have parents participating in Stand Up increased their capacity to advocate for their children ages 0-5?**

*Problem Statement:* Participants in the CoP noted that prior to their involvement in Stand Up they believed that New Orleans had not been a “child-centric” city, and that parents “are disengaged...in the political process, disenfranchised...and don’t have their tentacles into the decision makers and the power and authorities at the state level, or even at the city level.” Other observations from CoP members inferred a lack of civic engagement in the community, and that people and organizations had typically not been receptive to having “parents at the table.”

*Key Findings:*

- **Parents have put their confidence and skills as leaders into action in the community.** Parents have a greater belief in their ability to affect change, they are more involved in their communities, and they are standing up as parent leaders. CoP members described Stand Up parent meetings as “transformative” and a “metamorphosis” for participants; that they see parents now “taking stands” on community and school issues; and that now “we have stronger parent advocates.”

An exemplar of this change is the parent who tackled the issue of bullying in her son’s elementary school. After almost giving up in frustration trying to work with the school, “she decided instead to put into practice what she had learned (through the parent training meetings), and she started an anti-bullying program” at the school “even though her child was the bully.” The school has now adopted the program because of its success.

- **Stand Up funded learning activities resulted in increased parents’ self-agency.**

- **Parents have stronger skill sets (advocacy, civics, data, parental rights, and public speaking) as a result of Stand Up learning activities.**
- **Parents have increased their use of data to influence decisions and advocate for change affecting their children, families and communities.**
- **Parents have connected with other parents and organizations to bring about change.**

**Evaluation Question #3: To what extent did participation in the Community of Practice foster collaboration and learning from one another?**

*Problem Statement:* Organizations, prior to participating in the Stand Up initiative, did not know each other or have working relationships, and generally did not utilize collaborative practice or partnerships. The Greater New Orleans Foundation’s September 2011 “Needs Scan Report: Identifying the Organizational Effectiveness Needs of Nonprofit Organizations in the Greater New Orleans Region” found that the area’s nonprofit sector is “fragmented and siloed, and (that) this inhibits systemic change.” The report also noted area “nonprofits across all sectors are struggling with a variety of capacity challenges,” including “developing partnerships and collaborations between nonprofits.” Observations from the CoP participating groups and the Foundation’s Design Team paralleled the report’s findings.

*Key Findings:*

- **Participation in the CoP improved collaborative practice and resulted in joint projects and programs.**  
 “I think that this initiative has helped all of our organizations build that web of collaboration even stronger. I think that’s one of the number one byproducts (of Stand Up),” observed a CoP executive director.

A highly visible partnership emerged as a result of Stand Up, the first such collaborative effort between these two entities - Neighborhood Partnership Network (NPN) is a community-based, historically African-American organization, and the Louisiana Children’s Museum (LCM), a more traditional, established cultural institution.

The two organizations partnered around LCM’s “Family Fest” which served as the release party for NPN’s “*Trumpet*,” a community newspaper. The event attracted over 200 parents and children, and all twelve funded CoP groups participated by contributing articles to the paper and hosting information tables at the release event. The festival also served to introduce LCM as a community venue to new parents and groups.

- **CoP participants applied new parent engagement practices learned through the Stand Up meetings.**
- **CoP members have solved program implementation problems by working with their CoP colleagues.**

- Most CoP participants benefited from shared resources working with their fellow members; and all CoP members experienced the benefit of expanded relationships and information sharing.
- The CoP has taken greater ownership of the Stand Up initiative and its future through the establishment of a post-initiative action-based network of community organizations, parents and families.

*Other Findings from the Year Two Evaluation:*

- The Stand Up initiative is viewed as an “incomplete opportunity” needing more time and resource to take root.
- The design and implementation of the Stand Up initiative has transformed the Foundation’s practice as learning communities become an integral part of our grantmaking work.
- Through managing the Stand Up initiative, the foundation staff has increased leadership capacity and knowledge of communities of practice as a strategy for its work.

*Recommendations*

Through the analysis of the evaluation findings and observation of the initiative’s activities, these recommendations are made to further leverage the impact of Stand Up for Our Children into additional progress:

*For post-initiative next steps*

- The Greater New Orleans Foundation should “broker and advocate” on behalf of the new grantee and parent network to attract additional resource and participation.
- The Foundation should encourage this network to secure the support of key stakeholders early on, and assist the network in garnering resource to document learning and assess progress.

*For future Foundation initiatives*

- Document the internal organizational changes at the Greater New Orleans Foundation stimulated by the Stand Up initiative. Share this learning with staff and board and with grantees as a model that encourages collaboration and strengthened organizational effectiveness.
- Build in more pre-development time and resource in the design and launch of new initiatives to ensure participants are fully equipped for the journey ahead.
- Design future Foundation initiatives with longer implementation timelines so they can take hold and grow.

*For larger, longer-term community impact*

- The Foundation should convene Stand Up executive directors and invite other leaders to consider the need for a civic function to help New Orleans prioritize, act on and dedicate resource to a short list of key issues.