Practices To Keep
In After-School and Youth Programs

Supervision at the Beacons
Developing Leaders for After-School Programs
Established in 1991 in New York City, the Youth Development Institute (YDI) is one of a growing number of intermediary organizations throughout the United States that seek to create a cohesive community infrastructure to support the positive development of youth. YDI approaches its work with an understanding of and a respect for the complexities of young people’s lives and the critical role of youth-serving organizations in supporting young people’s growth and development.

YDI’s mission is to increase the capacity of communities to support the development of young people. YDI provides technical assistance, conducts research, and assists policy-makers in developing more effective approaches to support and offer opportunities to young people. At the core of YDI’s work is a research-based approach to youth development. This work is asset-based in focusing on the strengths of young people, organizations and their staff. It seeks to bring together all of the resources in the lives of young people—school, community, and family—to build coherent and positive environments. The youth development framework identifies five principles that have been found to be present when youth, especially those with significant obstacles in their lives, achieve successful adulthood:

- Close relationships with adults
- High expectations
- Engaging activities
- Opportunities for contribution
- Continuity of adult supports over time

The Youth Development Institute (YDI) also strengthens non-profit organizations and public agencies and builds programs that address gaps in services, in New York City and nationally. It provides training and on-site technical assistance, conducts research, develops practice and policy innovations, and supports advocacy. This work enables organizations and agencies to apply the most promising lessons from research and practice so that they operate efficiently and the young people they serve grow and develop through powerful, sustained, and joyful experiences. YDI helps organizations to design their programs based on sound knowledge about what works and provides their leaders and staff with the information and skills to implement these strategies effectively. YDI addresses gaps in youth services by developing new programs and policies in areas and for populations that are addressed inadequately.
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Introduction
1. INTRODUCTION

Practices to Keep In After-School and Youth Programs is a series of documentation reports that highlight successful approaches in Beacons, which are community centers in school buildings that combine youth and community development to support young people, families, and neighborhoods. Developed for Beacons, these approaches are also widely used in the expanding world of After-School and Youth Programs.

The reports demonstrate how local ingenuity applied to key issues over time can leverage individual, neighborhood, and policy change. They contain ideas for practitioners to adapt to their own programs and for policymakers who seek practical responses to critical concerns—literacy and academic support for youth, preparation for work and participation in the labor force, strengthening families and preventing foster care placement, and creating opportunities to play important roles that strengthen the fabric of community social organization.

The Beacons Movement and After-School Programming

Beacons were first established in New York City in 1991 as part of the Safe Cities Safe Streets program. Located in schools and operated by community-based organizations with core funding provided by New York City, the Beacons represent an innovative collaboration between the public and non-profit sectors to turn the school building into a true public resource. Today, more than 100 Beacons in five cities offer education, recreation, adult education, arts, and family programming after school, before school, on weekends, and during vacations. In New York City, Beacons serve more than 150,000 children, youth, and adults annually. Nationally they reach more than 250,000 individuals in San Francisco, Minneapolis, Denver, and West Palm Beach, Florida.

The Beacons forge partnerships across public, non-profit, and private institutions to fortify neighborhoods. They create pathways for participation between age groups and a continuum of programming that promotes healthy development and strong families. They contribute to local economic development by providing jobs to young people and adults. They help to make neighborhoods safe and connect residents to each other and to local resources. At a time when social services are increasingly located outside of the communities that need them, the Beacons serve as a hub for an array of social and educational supports.

Funding for the Beacon programs described in Practices to Keep in comes from a wide variety of sources. The range demonstrates a commitment by both the public and private sectors to the comprehensive work of Beacons, with support located in education, labor, child welfare, and human services. Sources include:

- Local tax levy
- Local, state, and federal foster care
- Private foundations
- Public-school dollars
- State after-school funding sources
- Summer Youth Employment Program (OTDA, US DOL)
- Supplemental Education Services, part of No Child Left Behind (US DOE)
- 21st Century Community Learning Centers (US DOE)
• Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention (NYSOYD)

• Workforce Investment Act: In-School Youth; Out-of-School Youth; Literacy (USDOL)

The need for the Beacons and other programs that build on similar principles is more urgent today than ever. The economic crisis that began in 2008 has affected every sector of society, but will inevitably hit hardest in poor communities where the Beacons are located. Too often, services are removed from the very neighborhoods where they are needed most. The Beacons place services in the center of poor communities. The gains that the Beacons help create must be protected, as the need for comprehensive and coordinated services, high quality education and work preparation, and community safety increases. The Beacons have earned the trust and respect of local residents and provide a tested infrastructure for attaching additional or consolidated programs.

*Practices to Keep In After-School and Youth Programs* illustrates how Beacons provide young people with pathways to increasingly responsible roles, involve youth and adults in improving their communities, and create environments of support to keep families together.
2

Supervision at the Beacons
2. SUPERVISION AT THE BEACONS

**Supervision at the Beacons: Developing Leaders for After-School Programs**

Supervision takes place through the ladder of leadership. You have to understand it experientially. In essence, one learns to supervise well by being supervised well. One learns to lead a group well by being in a group that is led well.

-Shira Sameroff, Lower Camp Director, Center for Family Life

The supervisory process is a critical element in the quality and effectiveness of Beacon programs. An examination of three sites profiled in Practices to Keep—The Center for Family Life (CFL) Beacon at P.S. 1 in Sunset Park, Brooklyn; Good Shepherd Services (GSS) Beacon at P.S. 15 in Red Hook, Brooklyn; and the University Settlement Beacon at East Side Community High School on the Lower East Side of Manhattan—revealed the following common principles and practices that guide the supervisory process:

- Overlapping staff meetings that ensure communication and accountability across different levels of staff
- One-on-one supervisory meetings that focus on mentoring and professional development
- Use of the social group work method to guide staff and participant meetings
- Use of the principles of youth development to guide staff and participant feedback such as high expectations, engaging activities, safety, a sense of belonging, caring relationships, and opportunities to contribute
- Strong and supportive lead agencies committed to mentoring, developing, and retaining staff

Together these practices comprise a multi-faceted web of guidance and support. The supervisory process develops the leadership skills of both staff and participants. It promotes individual and group development, both necessary for organizational health and growth. It models honest dialogue, reflection, and feedback at every level of the Beacon. A formal structure bolsters and sustains the process.

**The Overlapping Structure of Group Supervision**

The supervisory process at the Beacon is embedded in a system of overlapping meetings that stretch from the bottom to the top of the organization. On a weekly basis, a wide range of supervisory meetings take place, often on a scheduled supervision day. Senior, full-time staff meets with group leaders; group leaders meet with assistant group leaders and assistant group leaders; and group leaders meet with the participants in their group. In addition, senior staff meets in a combined meeting of group leaders, assistant group leaders and counselors-in-training (or leaders-in-training) for a larger program meeting. Finally, senior, full-time staff has their own meetings on a monthly basis. While this system may seem duplicative, it serves two important purposes. Firstly, it provides opportunity for open dialogue between all levels of the staff. Secondly, it provides more opportunities for youth staff to experience the process of both supervising and being supervised within a group setting.

**Staff Meetings and the Group Process**

Staff and participants experience the Beacon first and foremost as members of a group, and every group goes through a developmental process of beginnings, middles, and ending stages over the course of a year (see the profile on the Social...
Group Work method, part of this series, for a detailed description of this process). During this cycle, supervisors and the participants take on new roles and develop new skills. This process of group development is the primary vehicle through which youth staff are taught and trained to supervise. The following is an example from a staff meeting at the Center for Family Life Beacon.

At the weekly staff meeting, Helene Onserud, Director of the P.S. 1 Beacon, asks the youth staff to report on how things are going with their activity groups. Staff describes various forms of testing they experienced from the participants with whom they work. “Scapegoating,” “anger issues,” “not listening,” “slowing the group down,” are all issues that come up. One young man somberly says, “We’re definitely in middles.” Other staff members agree. A new assistant group leader, Nesita, is encouraged to share a difficult experience she had with her group this week. When her group leader had left the room, a participant took out a cell phone and began talking, violating a well-known rule at the Beacon. Nesita dutifully enforced the rules by insisting the girl turn over her cell phone. Although the girl complied, she did so while hurling angry words at Nesita. In front of her colleagues, Nesita recalls that experience, and the feelings of hurt they caused her. Helene asks the group to reflect on Nesita’s situation and what she can learn from it. Her colleagues point out that she is new, and with the group leader out of the room, this was the girl’s chance to test her. Helene also points out that the previous assistant group leader had left the group without closure, and that the girl might be displacing her anger at the former staff member onto Nesita. One staff member also points out that challenging authority and the subsequent conflict is typical of groups that are in the “middle stages” of group development “There is just a lot of anger right now,” says another. Nesitas’ peers remind her to not take it personally, that she did the right thing, and that this is part of the process. “In the mud,” muses one. The discussion moves on to strategies for helping groups through the middles stages of group development.

David Garcia, senior staff member on duty at the time, later explains how he coached Nesita through the process. “I told her to give me the cell phone and tell the girl I had the cell phone, to defuse the situation. But at the same time I told Nesita to go back into the room and give her specific advice on how to get things back on track.” He makes a point of saying that he did not solve the problem for her. Rather, he gave her immediate suggestions to cope with the situation, sent her back, and made sure to follow up with her afterwards. This scene explains much about the supervision process at the Beacons. At its core, it is a process of learning by doing. But this learning and doing is in no way haphazard or unplanned. Rather, it is a carefully calibrated process that happens over years, with a structured system of peer and supervisor support every step of the way.

Because new assistant group leaders like Nesita meet with both their immediate supervisors, the group leaders, and senior staff in the same week, they get to see the process of group facilitation modeled at least twice in one week. Shira Sameroff, Lower Camp Director of the CFL’s PS 1 Beacon, describes the environment senior staff seek to create in the meetings:

*We really work on making it a safe environment for honest feedback. We do not shy away from conflict and we work at talking straight. We model it in the staff meetings. People are respectful but they hold each other accountable. We are not nice and careful. We try to show young people how to talk about feelings and that sometimes, talking about differences can actually bring you closer to someone.*
Trust is also developed in the group meetings through the use of bonding activities that open nearly every meeting. Ice-breakers, team building activities, and appreciation exercises help staff to get to know one another as people so that “over time there is enough of a trust level built up to be really honest with each other.” Shira also notes that when new staff members come on board, those bonds of trust and safety have to be renewed.

Throughout the years, staff like Nesita will have the chance to work with supervisors at multiple levels, have numerous opportunities to voice her concerns, and get to learn from different supervisors. The approach is most succinctly summarized by Shira Sameroff, “Supervision takes place through the ladder of leadership. You have to understand it experientially. In essence, one learns to supervise well by being supervised well. One learns to lead a group well by being in a group that is led well.”

Learning to Manage Groups

The heart of Beacon program management takes place at the weekly staff meetings, where group leaders (and often assistant leaders) come together to discuss program progress with the full-time staff. At a recent GSS P.S.15 Beacon staff meeting, Assistant Beacon Director Jose Cordero asks group leaders to share lessons and materials they have been developing with help from area social workers. Group leader Z-Andrea Hill describes how she and her social worker partner have been working on “put-down prevention” with second graders, by introducing a “positive compliment game” daily. The other group leaders express interest and ask Z-Andrea to share it with them later. Group leader and full-time activity specialist Roland Knight explains why such discussions are useful to him:

Sometimes at the staff meetings someone will mention they’re having trouble with something in their group, someone throws out something they did that works, so you’ll hear something that sparks an idea like “all right I could try that with my group.”

All staff meetings involve some administrative housekeeping, such as reminders to keep lesson plans and attendance sheets up to date, return health care forms, and distribute or collect participant evaluations or surveys. At this meeting Assistant Director Asante tells staff that updated fingerprints and health forms are necessary to keep on file, or the Department of Health could shut down the program. She also matter-of-factly reminds staff that lateness issues “will show up in their evaluations.” Administrative directives are given in a calm tone, and the rationale for each bit of paperwork is explained as to why it is vital to the functioning of the organization. Staff appears to take these messages to heart. When asked about lesson planning for instance, Z-Andrea explains that, as per Beacon procedure, she and her program aide sit down and make out lesson plans for the entire upcoming month so that, “in case I can’t make it and somebody else has to fill in, they know exactly what we are doing.”

Senior staff members also routinely call on junior staff members to help them collectively problem solve and brainstorm solutions to organizational dilemmas. At the GSS meeting, Jose asks the group leaders to help him solve scheduling challenges he is having. Some group leaders are starting college, which means their schedules will be changing and as a result the entire staff schedule needs to be adjusted. While he is proud of the college-bound leader’s progress and wants to accommodate them “when good things are happening.” He also asks for help in figuring out how to adjust the collective staff schedule. He points out he is willing to make adjustments to the schedule when staff are improving themselves,
but he also adds, tongue-in-cheek, “Now, if you mess up and you have to go to summer school, I’m not going to change around peoples schedules because you messed up.” The staff laughs. Jose’s willingness to call on the staff to help him problem-solve attests to the model of accountability the Beacon aspires to. All staff is expected to be responsible for the welfare of the program. Because the adult staff invites them into this process of organizational management, younger staff is learning how to step into the role of organizational managers and project directors.

Similarly, younger staff has collective responsibility to plan, organize, and staff the Beacon-wide events that occur on a regular basis throughout the year. Group leaders and assistant group leaders form committees, assign roles, and evaluate collective progress on event planning. In planning these community-wide events, junior staff is encouraged to work with staff members they normally do not work with. This in turn builds relationships and new skills. Whether staff members realize it or not, they are being given a primer in non-profit organization.

**Mentoring Through One-on-One Supervision**

At the Beacon “everybody is supervised.” In addition to group meetings, supervision takes place through weekly one-on-one meetings with a supervisor. This is “process time,” in which staff members get to talk through how they are feeling about things. At CFL, Shira Sameroff says, “We focus on regular, consistent supervision. A key part is helping the supervisee learn how to use supervision well, and to actually take charge of their supervision. For example, people often need to learn how to ask for help. They need to learn what questions to ask to do their job well. At GSS, Z-Andrea describes what goes on in her supervision time, "My supervisor will ask me questions to get me thinking if maybe there’s another way to do things. Or if I’m not sure I did something right, I can go to her and she can give me her feedback. So it is very helpful."

To illustrate how one grows through this process, Shira remembers the following example, “I had trouble giving people negative feedback. Helene (her supervisor) pushed me, but in a supportive way. It was hard for me because I didn’t want people to feel bad. I got a lot of help with this from Helene. She explained to me why it was important and why I needed to do it. I talked through my fears with her first, then I practiced giving the negative feedback, and afterwards I went and talked to her about the process. Now I don’t mind being really mean (she laughs jokingly). No, now I am able to teach my supervisees how to give and receive negative feedback...”

Sasha Madero is a former group leader and now staff member at the University Settlement Beacon. One challenge she faced was learning how to deal with angry parents: “I had never had a parent yell at me before. So I went to the office and they provided support. Then I had some training in how to handle angry parents.” Like David, Roland, and Z-Andrea, Sasha has risen through the ladder of leadership to become a full-time staff member at the Beacon. She recounts the many skills she learned at the Beacon which include lessons planning, time management, and conflict resolution. Summing up her experience, she says, “They prepare you for a lot in this program.”

All Beacon staff members go through a formal performance evaluation process on an annual or bi-annual basis. Staff members are required to develop their own professional development goals in collaboration with their supervisor and, every six months, evaluate their progress toward those goals. This keeps both the supervisor and supervisee focused on the personal development of the staff member. For staff who are used to being
“other-centered,” focusing on their own goals can be crucial to preventing burn-out and dissatisfaction. Staff is also required to reflect on their own performance, which ensures a two-way dialogue about the work experience.

“It takes three to four years to be a good group leader,” says Jennifer Zanger. “You have to learn to recognize what your triggers are. You have to develop a certain level of maturity. The personal and professional process of growth is very intertwined. Young people face complex life issues that take time to work out.” At the CFL staff meeting, youth coordinator David Garcia expresses this same belief, “You need to know yourself. Reflect on yourself, so you know how you react and respond.” Another CFL staff member adds, “You need to look at your buttons.” Roland Knight at GSS sums it up, “You have to know YOU.”

Youth Supervising Youth – Group Leader & Assistant Meetings

Group leaders and program aides meet once a week to discuss lesson planning and group progress. They plan separately for each group they facilitate at the Beacon, taking into account the particular participant interests and academic challenges as well as the stage of the group’s development. Professional development workshops like “Ages and Stages” give them a sense of age-appropriate pedagogical strategies and curriculum to use. They may order materials from the internet and catalogs recommended by teachers and staff members, or plan field trips for their group using the Beacons contacts. Once a month they show their upcoming lesson plans for the month to their staff supervisor, who offers feedback and suggestions.

Like the staff above them, group leaders are expected to actively supervise and give professional development to their assistant group leaders. Z-Andrea says, “I give my program aide daily feedback because we work together daily. I find it comfortable. I’ve been through all the positions, so [at this point] it’s easy for me to tell someone what to do and for someone to let me know what’s going on with them.” She advises other group leaders, “Don’t be afraid to be the bad guy. Know your role, and let your staff know their role. You have to know where to draw lines, but you also have to have an open door. Learn how to give constructive feedback. Learn how to give and take criticism”.

Group leaders are also responsible for developing the skills of their assistants. Roland Knight believes, “Good teachers always teach their students how to take their place.” He says he tries to give his program aide opportunities to run things just as he learned. Ultimately assistants are trained in all aspects of running a group. Z-Andrea mentions that she is asked by her supervisor what she is teaching her program aide and how that relationship is progressing. As a result, she says, “Sometimes if there is a mediation [between children] to be done, I will let my program aide work with the kids on a mediation. It is good experience for her.” Group leaders are also often two-way conduits of information, passing down information from senior staff to the assistants and passing up feedback from the participants and the assistants to the senior staff.

Assistants take on supervision responsibilities slowly, at first only observing and helping the group leaders with whatever they might need in the room. Over time they take on more responsibility for managing and facilitating group activities. Shira Sameroff of the P.S. 1 Beacon explains why it is such a long process: “There is a danger in putting someone in a position before they are prepared – you can really set them up for failure. There are many rungs on the ladder. In fact, we have been working on adding more rungs (for example, the counselors-in-training or leaders-in-
training position in many Beacons has become an entry position of assistant to the assistant).” This apprenticeship period allows assistants to decide if youth work is right for them or if this age group is right for them. Group leaders and assistant group leaders attend trainings and workshops during the summer and throughout the school year to help them learn the nuts and bolts of their trade how to plan lessons, resolve conflicts, give feedback, talk to parents, etc. Workshops related to supervision have titles such as “Use of self in a group” (focused on how to use authority well), “How to reflect on the self,” and “Trust-building activities” focused on activities and strategies that can help group leaders facilitate groups.

Informally, Beacons also emphasize peer cooperation, feedback, and support. The group leaders sometimes meet on their own to talk about issues they are experiencing in their groups. Staff is encouraged by senior staff to work with different staff on different projects. As a result, Roland Knight says, “There is a close bond. We know each other. We are in constant communication and people mention what’s up with each other’s kids. I know, for me, some of the staff are close to some of the children in my group and they may mention to me that I know their brother and sister and they’re going through some stuff, so they may have a little bit of an attitude or be a little bit defiant, you might want to try this, or that.” During the day Roland also works as a staff member at P.S. 15, and he has noticed that kids carry over feelings from school to after-school. “If a few children are misbehaving, I see maybe they had a bad day with the teacher. So I relay that information to the group leader, so they know what’s going on with the student and they may try to be a little more lenient or try something else to manage and direct that child.” Z-Andrea concurs, “We tell each other when we notice things.” Occasionally staff will have conflicts and need reassignments, but generally staff report they, “know to leave their issues at the door.” Roland Knight comments, “Sometimes we got to bite the bullet and say, “We’re here to work.” We don’t have to be friends, but when we work we have to act like the best friends ever because it’s for the kids.”

**Giving & Getting Feedback from Youth Participants**

Each group leader and assistant group leader holds a community meeting with participants in his or her group once a week. Participants discuss how things are going in the group. Group leaders find out what participants are thinking and vice-versa. Feedback is a three-way process. Group leaders give feedback to the participants. Participants give feedback to the group leader. Participants give feedback to each other. The process of learning how to give and receive constructive feedback is considered an essential skill for all to learn.

Shira Sameroff describes the weekly group meetings, “Through their own experiences giving and receiving feedback in supervisory and staff meetings, the group leaders have learned how to facilitate a group meeting. We train group leaders to make it a safe space where people can give honest feedback. Children also know they can go to the directors, if they want to give feedback. The fact that all staff, including the directors, run activities directly with kids means that no one is sitting behind a desk. Everybody is in touch with what is going on.”

Getting feedback from children and parents is easy. “Kids will be honest with you about what’s working and what’s not working. If they don’t like something they will tell you,” says Z-Andrea. Roland agrees, “Kids are very honest. They call it as they see it. When you work with kids, you remember that we were that age at one time, so in a way you’re just seeing life all over again. The same mistakes you made, you see it in them. You
see a lot of similarities, you see the thought process and you try to figure it out yourself: Why did they do this? Why did they do that? In a way it is like a mirror. They teach me how to stay on top of my game as a worker.” Of her experience running group meetings, Sasha recalls, “They told me everything. They trusted me, and we all communicated. Some even called me mom.”

**Feedback Systems Among Senior Staff**

Beacon staff must constantly adapt to shifting realities: changing schedules, staff turn over, shifting access to space, end of funding sources, changing reporting requirements, and daily plans can be disrupted by a sudden crisis. Through all this change, the director must set the tone of a shared vision that rises above the daily stress of uncertainty. “To become a good Beacon program manager you also have to become really good at articulating the mission of the Beacon and relating that mission to the practice of specific Beacon activities,” says Jennifer Zanger, director of the Brooklyn Youth Programs for Good Shepherd Services. “You have to be able to go from the macro picture to the micro picture. You have to be “mission-driven.” That is, you have to get staff to buy-in to a vision bigger than themselves.” In a similar vein, Monique Flores, Director of the University Settlement Beacon, states that, “It is important to promote the core principles of youth development in group consistency, high standards, and by focusing on young people’s strengths and assets.”

In all three Beacons, the Beacon Directors are “hands-on.” They interact on a daily basis with children and know many of them by name. They make it a point of engaging in the same kinds of program activities and meetings in which they supervise others. Thus, they have the experience of being “on the ground” with their staff. “It is a tricky balance between being on the ground and not micro-managing,” says Jennifer Zanger. “If there is a difficult problem where the seriousness of the problem needs to be conveyed to a staff member or participant, the assistant director will pull me in strategic situations. But this is effective because I remain involved and on the ground. I attend meetings and am known by the staff and the participants. So they know my face and who I am if there ever has to be a serious talk.” She gives an example of why this is important. Recently the Beacon had to consolidate its space and staff with another after-school program. She helped coordinate every step of the merger. As they discussed the merger with both sets of staff, it surfaced that there were some hard feelings. To ensure the merger ran smoothly, she had to be involved in helping reconcile the two parties. She points out that while at some point she had to let go and allow the managers to work out arrangements by themselves, it was important she saw for herself what was going on for her judgment to be considered legitimate by all parties.

Despite the fast-paced pressure of daily program delivery at the University Settlement Beacon, senior staff members Monique Flores, Greg Robertson, Elisa Valentin, and Melissa Velasquez always carve out time for regular staff meetings. “We’re a team. It’s important to have us together so we are not fragmented,” says Assistant Director Greg Robertson. “We need to know what’s going on with each other. In addition to coordinating things, it helps us stay connected. It’s a place to ground us together.” While specific issues with children, parents, or staff are routinely discussed at these meetings, these meetings are also a place to vent, take a step back to reflect on the process, and give the staff chances to find connections in their planning.

Senior staff, who have been trained in the social group work method, continue to practice it in their own meetings. Jennifer Zanger observes that “What is going on at the group level is often also
reflected in meetings at the higher levels. The same set of principles and language are applied. I teach my group leaders to see parallels between groups. The experience of the social group work method and the supervision of it go hand in hand."

**Sustaining Good Supervisors – The Role of the Lead Agency**

This commitment to supportive staff development starts at the top. At all three lead agencies that run each of the three Beacons, senior staff meet frequently to connect, support each other, and report on progress. “Even directors at CFL get together and get to share our struggles and challenges,” notes Shira Sameroff. “Everyone needs support. To feel connected and invested, and to feel like it’s worth all the hard work. It helps us feel like part of a community.”

It is no accident that all three directors of the Beacons profiled were trained in lead agencies that have a long history of commitment to community service and youth development principles. Each of these agencies is known for “walking their talk.” Jennifer Zanger notes that her agency commits a day to a day and a half of her weekly schedule to supervision. Monique Flores credits her development as a program director to the support and guidance from her supervisors at her lead agency, University Settlement. She believes her supervisors conveyed two central messages to her from the start, “high expectations (as in ‘you better be perfect!’) with an incredible amount of support designed to help me be perfect.” She adds, “They take a strong interest in developing their staff. They brought me to an international conference in Finland this year. They work to develop the staff at all levels.” She now strives to model that combination of support and high expectations throughout her Beacon.

Each of the directors of the three Beacons had the benefit of extensive support and training as they grew into their roles as directors. Each credits consistent supervision by strong mentors as critical to their development. Jennifer Zanger, for example, describes her evolution as a supervisor, “I got to grow into it by supervising MSW students, a few cases at a time. I got to run my own piece of a program. So I incrementally moved into the role, gradually gaining more and more responsibility. So I developed both the clinical and the programmatic and managerial aspects. And I had guidance. I had the experience of good supervision and then got the chance to try it out in smaller pieces, growing into larger roles.” This commitment to retain and develop staff from within, in a field known for its high-turnover and low pay, demonstrates these agencies’ commitment to their values.

**A Spiral of Professional Development, from Supervision to Development**

Rather than a ladder, perhaps the best metaphor for supervision at the Beacons is a “spiral” of professional development. It is a spiral because while individuals and cohorts ascend in their training, they also continue to circle around and back to the same principles of individual and group development through their ongoing work. Moreover, these principles of individual and group development remain intertwined. Self knowledge is critical to understand how one behaves in a group. That self knowledge is used to develop the group. The group in its turn has its own dynamic and will grow through stages, which in turn develops the individual. The participant and leader must have an intimate understanding of themselves, the group, and how those two things interact in order to manage a group well. It is a continuous and demanding process of self, group, and organizational development. But this process fosters transparency, respect, accountability, support, trust, and a sense of belongingness at every level of the organization.
3 Beacons Movement and Youth Programming
The Beacons Movement and Youth Programming

Beacons forge partnerships across public, non-profit, and private institutions to fortify neighborhoods. They create pathways for participation across age groups and a continuum of programming that promotes healthy development and strong families. They provide jobs to young people and adults, which contribute to local economic development. They help to make neighborhoods safe and connect residents to each other and to local resources. At a time when social services are increasingly located outside of the communities that need them, they serve as a hub for an array of social and educational supports.

Beacons were among the first citywide after-school initiatives. The massive expansion of after-school programs that began in 1992 was fueled in part by the early example of the Beacon movement. But while after-school programs use a service-delivery approach, Beacons use a comprehensive community development model with a focus on youth development. Activities in every area, from after-school to adult education, are embedded in the process of building community that:

- Supports and engages local youth.
- Feels a sense of ownership, with a desire to convert a school building into a community center.
- Recognizes and supports community resources, builds the capacity of youth and other community members to identify needs, address issues, and capitalize on different strengths.

The Beacons, while diverse and responsive to neighborhood interests and strengths, are shaped by a core set of youth development principles that research has shown help people to achieve stronger outcomes: caring relationships, high expectations, opportunities to contribute, engaging activities, and continuity in relationships.

As a result of their experience in developing Beacons, many organizations that started as “mom and pop” associations in response to neighborhood needs now offer extensive family and youth-supporting services including foster care, drop out prevention, summer youth employment, and out-of-school time activities. In New York City and San Francisco, these organizations advance school reform efforts. Applying youth development principles and a commitment to the success of all students, they have helped to reshape high schools, making them more personalized, and sharply increasing graduation rates among youth who previously would have dropped out.

The Beacons provide multiple opportunities for young people to build the 21st-century skills that are essential to their development and success as workers, citizens, and environmental stewards. They help young people respond to the changing demands of the workplace and the increased need for post-secondary education. In Beacons, young people:

- Work in teams, solve problems, and master critical skills.
- Take on powerful roles that make a difference to their peers and their communities
- Get involved in planning projects, assessing their communities, analyzing results, and taking action to address local problems.
- Master core literacy skills in reading, writing, media, and technology.
- Teach, mentor, and serve as role models for younger children.
- Collaborate with adults around important issues.

Supervision at the Beacons
All these opportunities build the skills and knowledge the next generation needs to succeed in the 21st century and to sustain the well-being of the nation and earth.

Each Beacon city also includes an intermediary organization that provides training and support to the Beacon and works with policy makers to sustain the vision. For example, in New York City, the Youth Development Initiative, is one such intermediary that offers training and coaching to sites, develops programs, and works with the city and advocacy groups to support best practices. In San Francisco, the San Francisco Beacon Initiative, convenes a citywide group of leaders in philanthropy and public agencies to build support for the Beacons, raise funds, and provide training and related supports to sites.

**Evidence of Success & Continuing Need**

Evaluations in New York and San Francisco find that Beacons attract participants of all ages, many of whom attend on a regular basis. Participation by substantial numbers of adolescents, traditionally the hardest to recruit and retain in out-of-school programs, is the result of adherence to youth development principles. Among adolescents, the Beacons increase young people’s self-efficacy and the level of effort they put into school, which are both critical factors in school success and persistence (Walker & Arburton, 2004). They provide extensive homework help, enrichment activities that build skills and knowledge, and connections with schools and families on academic issues (Warren, 1999, pp 3-6). They help youth avoid negative behaviors such as drug use and fighting, and foster leadership and provide opportunities for volunteering and contributing to community (Ibid, p. 5). In neighborhoods like Red Hook in Brooklyn, where residents were once afraid to leave their apartments at night, the Beacon is not only a haven, but has, through its programs and networks, made the whole community safer (see *Practices to Keep: Preventing Placement in Foster Care: Strengthening Family and Community Ties*. Youth Development Institute, 2009).

The need for Beacons and other programs that build on similar principles is more urgent today than ever. The economic crisis that began in 2008 has affected every sector of society, but will inevitably hit poor communities where Beacons are located the hardest. Too often, services are removed from the very neighborhoods where they are needed most. The Beacons place services in the center of poor communities. The gains that Beacons helped create must be protected, as need increases for comprehensive and coordinated services, high quality education, work preparation, and community safety. Beacons have earned the trust and respect of the local residents, and provide a tested infrastructure for attaching additional or consolidating programs.

*Practices to Keep* illustrates how Beacons provide young people with pathways to increasingly responsible roles, involve youth and adults in improving their communities, and create environments of support to keep families together. They all depend on partnerships and all recognize that their impact is inextricably tied to collective action. All told, these efforts add up to potent forces for local economic development and building cohesive communities.