



Hmong Community Design Group January to May, 2015

A Project of the Mission Impact Council

DESIGN GROUPS: The Mission Impact Council and Hmong community leaders and youth held a series of six monthly design meetings.

GOAL: The goal was to begin identifying needs and *co-creating* initiatives that would increase life opportunity and equity for all Hmong youth.

CONTENT: Monthly discussions focused on five topics: youth development and leadership, employability, diversity, health and wellness, education and support services.

RESULTS: Community members, including youth, identified key gaps and obstacles in each of the above areas that could increase life opportunities and equity for their youth. Their comments and ideas are presented on the following pages in three sections:

1. **Access:** Do Hmong youth have equal *access* to youth programs and opportunities?
2. **Quality:** Are the programs that Hmong youth access *high quality*?
3. **Purpose:** Do existing programs serve the most important *purposes and needs* of Hmong youth and their community?

The Mission Impact Council

The Mission Impact Council convenes diverse organizations and communities to work together for positive social change through developing innovative and community-based solutions that change life opportunities for and with urban and underserved youth in the Twin Cities. The co-chairs of the collective impact initiative are:

- Wokie Weah, President of Youthprise
- Todd Tibbits, Chief Operating Officer of the YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities
- Meghan Barp, Senior Vice President, Community Impact, at Greater Twin Cities United Way

For more information, contact Hedy Walls, the Vice-President of Social Responsibility at the YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities:

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Hmong Youth Development Opportunities

How can the Mission Impact Council Act as a Supportive Ally?

| | Issue | Opportunity | Insights |
|----------------|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Access | Parent Support | Find ways to gain parent support and approval for their children to participate in youth development opportunities. | Families strongly value academics & youth development activities can be seen as a distraction. Key to get parental understanding & support. |
| | Affordability | Make youth development opportunities accessible for families from all income levels. | Programs are more available to those with many resources & with few (through scholarships). Mid-income families can struggle. |
| | Male Involvement | Attract more Hmong male youth to diverse youth development opportunities. | Girls more frequently engaged and successful in school and leadership. Boys can be held back by stereotype and not explore their potential. |
| | Communication | Find more effective ways for Hmong families to find out about youth development opportunities. | Some of the families and youth had never heard of the YMCA or other youth development opportunities. |
| Quality | Family Partnership | Include, involve, & support families' role in youth development. | Approach should be to work with families, not just individual youth. |
| | Diversity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate pride in culture, values • Bridge gaps with mainstream programs. | Programs sometimes don't work well with families, don't want feedback, have low expectations, and can be culturally biased. |
| | Program Diversity | Provide options for many different kinds of interests. | Youth need to explore and grow diverse talents. |
| | Program Improvement | Promote more training for programs serving Hmong youth | Need cultural insights and connections. |
| Purpose | Leadership and Service | Support Hmong youth leadership development and commitment to contribute to their community. | Many youth enjoy and want more leadership and service opportunities. |
| | Community Learning | Gain access to learning opportunities/ exposure outside the Hmong community. | Many youth isolated from learning activities outside the community; stay at home in summer. |
| | Trust | Youth development organizations spend more time in the Hmong community so both sides can build their trust and knowledge. | Mainstream youth development organizations sometimes seen as disconnected and only for the middle class. |
| | Mentoring | Connect educated role models from diverse fields to youth. | Successful people not always take time for youth. |

Hmong Employability Opportunities

How can the Mission Impact Council Act as a Supportive Ally?

| | Issue | Opportunity | Insights |
|----------------|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Access | Career Exploration | Create more opportunities for internships and other career exploration including for those under 16. | Businesses are committed elsewhere or afraid (don't know how to do it). Create opportunities that aren't full internships (episodic volunteering) |
| | Networking | More opportunities and skills for networking that could lead to career opportunities. | Some youth tied most to family and clan and not have outside contacts to open opportunities. Not understand networking. |
| | Risk-Taking | Encourage a mindset that values exposure to new experiences beyond one's comfort zone (e.g. summer camp, science museum, volunteering). | Easy to stay in your own family and clan/ not have outside ties/ not do anything different in the summer. Need value for stepping out. Isolation can limit future prospects. |
| Quality | Skill Training | Increase JQ (job intelligence) about career choices/ options: how to look for and get a job; how entrepreneurs start their own businesses. | May succeed in education but also need formal and informal employability learning opportunities: values; financial literacy, EQ,, dress for success, and more. |
| | Cultural Value | Strong parental and cultural value for employment choices and opportunities. | High priority of parents to see children set up in a job & career. Area where possible to get support. |
| Purpose | Mobilizing Parent Support | Educate parents about 21st century job skills and how they can be developed in and out of the classroom. | Need to know that life skills are employability skills. Sports, service-learning, leadership, etc. learn much beyond the classroom. |
| | Value Conflict | Sometimes strong pressure to make money. | How balance need for money and finding a fulfilling career? |
| | Self Awareness | Opportunities to learn about their passions, strengths, values, and goals. | Some Hmong youth are book savvy but not in other ways like with people. |
| | Community Support | Mobilize community-wide vision and support for employability. | Clans can compete against each other (we're most successful). Need to rally whole community for all. |
| | Role Models | Connect and job shadow with diverse careers (e.g. performance artists, law enforcement, elected officials) | Some successful Hmong not as likely to help others develop; feels threatening to groom others Need to see successful Hmong professionals. |

Hmong Educational Opportunities

How can the Mission Impact Council Act as a Supportive Ally?

| | Issue | Opportunity | Insights |
|----------------|--------------------------|---|--|
| Access | Visibility | Educational data needs to be disaggregated so it's possible to identify progress and problems | Data now merged with multiple Asian groups. Parents fear falling through the cracks because of socio-economic issues. |
| | Higher Education | Many access issues (understand, admissions, finances, purpose, mindset, relation to employability). | Many get into college but not have a support structure; may fail and owe loans which discourages parents sending others. |
| | Communication | Find more ways to communicate about education that doesn't involve text. | Word of mouth is powerful in community. Grandmother may hear on radio or TV but not read. |
| | Support Services | Families need broad supports (e.g. food, mental health, tutors, physical health, homework). | Children arrive at school with multiple unmet needs that can interfere with education. |
| Quality | Diversity/ Equity | Bridge gap between mainstream educational institutions and Hmong community. | Assumptions can interfere e.g. must need ESL or because you are quiet you must be understanding content. |
| | Parent Education | Provide more preparation for kindergarten for parents; outreach for all families. | Parents may not understand today's educational system & standards, so can't support children as needed |
| | Policy | Hire more teachers and staff that speak Hmong. | Need people in the system that get and represent Hmong culture. |
| | Family Voice | More ways to engage Hmong/ Karin parents where may not be a custom. Empowered parents may still not be heard. . | Teach parents how to advocate, but then system doesn't want to listen. PTO not at times can meet. Need more ways than PTO to engage. |
| Purpose | Academic Pressure | High pressure on students for school, college and to make money. (Success defined by educational level). | Many youth also enjoy and want more leadership, sports, service-learning and other enrichment opportunities beyond classroom. |
| | Goal Conflict | Everyone wants what is best, but need to find consensus of what that is. How do we decide what "success" is? | Need opportunities for parents (academic pressure) and youth (desire for more enrichment) to find balance and workable solution |
| | Community Support | Mobilize community-wide support for Hmong education | Strong support for family and clan; spread support to all in community. |
| | Mentoring | Connect educated role models from diverse fields to help guide. | Successful people not always willing to take time for youth. |

Hmong Health & Wellness Opportunities

How can the Mission Impact Council Act as a Supportive Ally?

| | Issue | Opportunity | Insights |
|----------------|---|--|--|
| Access | Limited Physical Activity Facilities | Limited space for physical activity in urban setting; need recreation center where welcome youth. | Safety issue in housing project; “can hear a pin drop outside in summer”; Karin soccer lack space. |
| | Nutrition | Multiple obstacles to accessing healthy food. | Food not available or people feel too expensive. |
| | Organized Sports | Youth ready for and expecting more organized athletics | Not just go to park; want coaching; middle school volleyball growing. |
| | Summer Activities | Need more summer options/ outlets. Need value for stepping out. Isolation can limit future. | Easy to stay in your own family and clan/ not have outside ties/ not do anything different in the summer. |
| | Transportation | Transportation and child care to facilitate health and wellness. | Have large families and even if have car, many other demands on it. |
| Quality | Elder Fitness | Young concerned by lack of activity by elders, especially in winter. | Community gardening opportunities as one possible avenue for summer. |
| | Low-Cost Fitness Options | Find ways to make health facilities more available. | YMCA financial assistance scale sometimes not enough. |
| | Health Education | Education on many issues including different impact of Hmong traditional diet versus American diet. | How Hmong community can deal with rates of diabetes, obesity, gout, liver & kidney disease, high blood pressure, |
| | Health Care | Need for care that addresses Hmong specific needs. | Want practitioners that understand Hmong culture; also eye care |
| | Elder Leadership | Whatever happens in health area needs to come from Elders changing social norms. | Nothing happens until Elders are convinced; need to respect culture. |
| Purpose | American Lifestyle | Need to learn to cope with American lifestyle. | Need a way to cope with lifestyle change— stress level, diet, etc. |
| | Culturally Relevant Programs | Provide culturally relevant programs; also cultural attitudes can interfere with good health; | Make connection between physical activity and wellness; cultural perception that plump is attractive. |
| | Healthy Relationships | Important to promote healthy relationships in home. | Trying to balance patriarchal tradition and youth dialogue. |
| | Sexual Health | Sexual health education; Need way prevent teen pregnancy. | Girls need life goals, mentoring (e.g. Hmong alumni of U. of MN). |
| | Alcohol | Complicated relationship with alcohol—part of cultural traditions/ ceremonies; not polite to turn down | Alcohol abuse/ lose driving license; tradition only men drink, now women too; need Elders to change social norm |
| | Mental Health | Multiple issues: bullying, self-harm, self-esteem, depression | Code of silence; youth respect elders and not speak up |

Hmong Diversity Opportunities

How can the Mission Impact Council Act as a Supportive Ally?

| | Issue | Opportunity | Insights |
|---------|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Access | Educating Minnesota | Need to educate the general community about the Hmong American experience. | Do so and avoid “single story narrative” (i.e. that all Hmong have the same story). |
| | Stereotype Threat | Hmong face many wrongful stereotypes (e.g. We eat dogs and cats” and “we don’t speak English well,” etc.) | Need to find way to erase denigrating stereotypes and project positive traits and images of Hmong in mainstream and social media. |
| | Exposure to Diversity | Need to balance preserving culture and exposure to activities outside the Hmong community. | Need to encourage (not discourage) . associating with activities outside the culture and community; now not likely to lead in multi-cultural group. |
| | Generational Differences | People overlook that there is great diversity within Hmong community | Differences not only between generations but between those born here and those not. |
| | Cultural Preservation | Need to grow programs that help youth find their identity and their place in Hmong history. | Reinforcing value of community identity and traditions is about who you are. |
| Quality | Visible Hmong Leadership | Offer programs and services that are led by Hmong team members/ leaders. | Important that youth see Hmong leaders as the face of the community. |
| | Blended Cultures | Help navigate the blending of Hmong and new culture. | Causes intergenerational conflict (need to understand and respect each other). |
| | Strengthening Families | Challenged by American lifestyle that is more about individualistic mindset and less about family relationships. | Family and clan connections are critical to preserve centrality of the family and culture; need parent-child culture program. |
| | Parent-Child Programs | Expand number of parent-child programs on language, culture. | Start at a young age building cultural knowledge and identity. |
| Purpose | Youth Leadership | Find more ways for youth to provide service and leadership in the community. | One strategy for preserving culture is to have youth take leadership in doing so. |
| | Language | Find ways to preserve Hmong language as an anchor for the culture. | Youth losing the language limits cultural preservation. |
| | Value Conflict | Values clashes — parents focus on school and career success and youth also desire to participate in out of school activities. | Challenge of blending and building on both life experiences. |