

Strategic Relationships Contribute to Cross-System Collaboration in Seattle's Generation Work Initiative

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Introduction

Young adults' individual needs often differ from those of their peers in both minor and significant ways, and no single workforce training program model will meet the needs of all participants. While the workforce training system can best meet young people's various employment training needs through a vibrant network of partners and services, many staff in the workforce training system do not have a full picture of their potential partners or the services and supports available through other organizations. Additionally, young adults (ages 18-29) prepare to join the workforce in different ways and at different life stages, so they need different types of support than younger teenagers (ages 13-17). By helping staff get to know and trust one another across organizations, Generation Work (see textbox to the right) has helped its Seattle local partnership develop a more coordinated and integrated system for youth and young adults who enter the system. This more coordinated process now helps young people who reach out for support at different points in their professional skills development trajectory by connecting them to organizations that are best suited to meet their needs.

This brief is one of five case studies that examine how local partnerships in the Generation Work initiative have scaled up the use of positive youth development (PYD) approaches in training programs for young people who seek high-quality training and employment. The case studies grew from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's interest in learning more about how the five local partnerships integrated PYD approaches into their workforce training programs for youth in order to generate systematic knowledge about PYD that other workforce training practitioners can apply.

Specifically, this brief describes how the Seattle partnership's work embodied a PYD approach in two important ways. First, the partnership brought more organizations into city-wide conversations to make the employment system less siloed, which allowed individual staff members to better understand the strength(s) of other organizations. Second, it supported the improved identification of appropriate linkages

Generation Work

Launched by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2015, Generation Work™ aims to connect more of America's young adults with meaningful employment by changing the way public and private systems prepare them for jobs. As part of the initiative, partners in five sites across the nation—Cleveland, Hartford, Indianapolis, Philadelphia, and Seattle—are working to align various education, employment, and support services to help young people develop the skills required to succeed in the working world; link them with employers; and increase advancement and earning opportunities.

By combining employer-facing strategies that are aligned to labor market needs with positive youth development techniques—such as hands-on learning and mentoring—the initiative aims to blend services into more cohesive pathways that promote equitable employment opportunities for all young people.

and services for different young people—particularly for the sake of referring youth to programs suited to their needs—which helped young people better meet their goals.

To inform this brief, Child Trends researchers conducted a series of interviews during a three-day site visit in January 2020, to identify how increased communication across organizations in the Seattle partnership's workforce training system allowed partners to reach more youth and more effectively match those youth with programs that meet their individual needs and goals. Note that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the partnership's work has shifted in significant ways but the relationships developed through Generation Work have been a source of strength in a very difficult year.

Summary of key findings

In Seattle, partner staff members reported that Generation Work has allowed their team to be more collaborative and less competitive; this, in turn, has allowed staff to better meet the individual needs of youth and young adults in their programs through referrals, linkages, goal-setting conversations, and more.

- **Prior to connecting through Generation Work, bureaucratic roadblocks prevented organizational partners from effectively reaching high numbers of youth in Seattle; through Generation Work, however, organizational collaboration has allowed partners to discuss and troubleshoot many of those challenges.** By working jointly to navigate policy and logistical challenges, organizations are also able to strengthen their collaboration.
- **The collaboration has contributed to a less competitive cross-program environment.** Before Generation Work, key partners in Seattle did not feel that competition across programs was a large problem, but there is now an active understanding of and value for the partnership they have created.
- **Through quarterly meetings with key partners—and in larger learning communities in which different key stakeholders participated—the partnership's goal has become more explicit: to develop processes to support collaboration.** In these meetings, organizations became more aware of their own strengths and limitations and learned how they could enhance pathways for youth through partnership—for example, through co-location of service organizations that complement one another.
- **Generation Work provided the structure for organizations to better know one another and to understand how a variety of pathways could more effectively reach and serve youth and young adults.** It was sometimes challenging for organizations to set up partnerships but, in retrospect, some respondents wondered why these conversations hadn't happened before.
- **Programs are creating environments that embrace inclusion and openness.** These environments are intended to embrace inclusion and openness so that all young people feel supported.

Context

About positive youth development

Positive youth development (PYD) is an approach that encourages providers to focus on their clients' unique attributes. By adopting a PYD approach, programs commit to responding to young people's current circumstances and tailoring programming to the appropriate developmental stage of each participant, to the extent that they can.

Repeatedly, practitioners refer to this as “meeting young people where they are.” While this approach may seem difficult or resource-intensive, we have observed programs focus on young people's individual needs, goals, and strengths as they help them successfully complete a program, training, or other initiative. Program staff can better meet the needs of individuals by developing positive relationships with young people; ensuring physically and emotionally safe environments; strengthening linkages between organizations, families, and communities; and improving youth's developmentally appropriate skills (that is, their soft skills as well as their academic and technical competencies). Organizations may struggle to identify concrete ways to implement PYD approaches consistently for all participants, and many report a desire for a PYD-specific training to offer their staff. However, a PYD approach requires nimble and creative thinking on the part of staff to “meet participants where they are,” as well as an organizational culture that supports both staff and young people. This individualized approach is more complex than simply sending staff to a training and is more likely to engage young adults and achieve positive outcomes. The Seattle team has sought to incorporate a PYD approach into its systems-focused work by making sure that programs are aware of each participant's needs and open to the possibility that a different program might be a better fit. Additionally, by co-locating services when possible, the team has sought to make it easier to link participants to services once specific needs have been identified.

Child Trends' Previous Generation Work Research

As a national research partner for Generation Work, Child Trends supports the Annie E. Casey Foundation in generating systematic knowledge about the use of PYD approaches in workforce training settings. For this purpose, we developed the [PILOT Assessment in 2018](#), which is a self-reflection tool for workforce training staff. The first year of Generation Work emphasized five dimensions of PYD (defined in more detail in the full assessment, linked above):

- Positive Relationships
- Improved Skills
- Linkages Across School, Work, Families, and Communities
- Opportunities to Contribute and Belong
- Trustworthy and Safe Settings

During the development of the PILOT tool, we interviewed leadership and staff at the five local partnerships, as well as youth and young adult participants, to learn how the partnerships were integrating PYD into their work with young people. We found that each local partnership was already engaging in PYD practices that we felt would be useful to teach to other workforce training practitioners.

To expand on what we learned while developing the PILOT tool, we are completing five case studies to examine how each local partnership built certain pieces of its PYD approach.

Generation Work in Seattle

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Generation Work initiative aims to change the way public and private systems prepare young Americans (ages 18 to 29)—particularly young people of color from low-income families—for jobs and careers. In Seattle, the key partners in the Generation Work initiative have changed

over time. At the time of our interviews, five organizations and one independent researcher were key actors in their local partnership:

- Port Jobs
- Northwest Education Access (NWEA, and formerly Seattle Education Access)
- King County Reconnect to Opportunity and Peer Connectors
- A local ethnographer
- Aerospace Joint Apprenticeship Committee (AJAC)
- ANEW
- Community Center for Education Results (CCER)

This evolving partnership included a variety of key stakeholders. Port Jobs—located in the airport jobs office—currently leads the team. NWEA provides college counseling and guidance around access to higher education. Reconnect to Opportunity is a King County (the county in which Seattle is located) government initiative that hires youth peer connectors for one year to help young people by sharing their own experiences and lessons. In addition, peer connectors can link young people to a variety of services, such as housing, access to affordable food, child care, health care, etc. Finally, AJAC and ANEW provide opportunities for formal multi-year apprenticeships in construction and aerospace; they also provide opportunities for young people to learn about these sectors and trades and prepare to apply for apprenticeships.

The Generation Work partnership in Seattle identified transportation, logistics, advanced manufacturing, and construction/trades as the primary sectors with potential for sufficient career and wage growth; these sectors enable youth and young adults to earn a living wage or develop a longer-term career. A key focus of the Generation Work initiative has been a more integrated employment training system. In Seattle, the Generation Work local partnership initially identified the need to strengthen the various on-ramps for youth and young adults. The Seattle team described on-ramps as the multitude of different pathways by which a young adult may enter the workforce development system—through schooling, via an apprenticeship, through a friend’s referral, etc. The team recognized that each young person comes into the employment training system with a different background, goals, barriers, and strengths. Given these varied needs, key stakeholders serving this population of youth and young adults identified two factors—partners getting to know each other better and more thoroughly integrating their services—to better meet participants’ needs by helping them enter pathways that worked for them, no matter where they entered the system.

Although their goals were similar, Seattle’s Generation Work approach differed from other sites. In Philadelphia, Generation Work supported the creation of a learning community for mid-level managers (see [here](#)). In Cleveland, the grant created an opportunity for two organizations to work together in a new way (case study forthcoming). In Seattle, Generation Work funds stimulated many key stakeholders to identify ways to be more accountable to one another without a specific, formal structure, which prompted development of a more regular process to meet with, communicate, plan, and support one another.

At the beginning of Generation Work, the Seattle team recognized that “despite the recent growth of the local re-engagement system, there is a deep awareness that these programs need to build more intentional pathways to employers and good jobs, not just to the secondary credentials needed to access jobs.” Therefore, while secondary credentials remain a component of the system of linkages across organizations, developing a deeper and broader network of connections was a new and valuable endeavor.

The core team of Generation Work members meets quarterly, a timeframe designed to keep partners accountable to a regular and reliable schedule for check-ins but that is not overly burdensome. While the data for this case study were collected in January 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic was declared a

public health emergency, these meetings have continued virtually during the pandemic. The meetings provide an opportunity to share updates, discuss new challenges, identify grant opportunities for which either individual organizations or groups of organizations are eligible, and develop collective solutions to joint challenges. Additionally, members of the core team more regularly participate in a number of learning communities. These communities are not Generation Work learning groups: Some existed long before Generation Work and include staff from organizations that are not core Generation Work members. However, the core Generation Work team that meets quarterly is involved in the broader learning community system in Seattle. This integration of the core Generation Work team into other learning communities creates an opportunity for broader awareness of area happenings and opportunities related to young adults.

Conducting the Seattle Case Study

For each case study in this series, the Child Trends team chose a topic that the local partnership wanted to learn more about and that would generate broader lessons for the employment training field. Ultimately, we chose a case study to highlight how increased collaboration among a group of practitioners stimulated integration and collaboration around positive supports for youth and young adults. Additionally, this increased collaboration developed in Seattle even without the type of specific motivating challenge found in several other Generation Work sites, such as a new partnership that needed to be worked out or a specific training that prompted the collaborative work. Instead, the partners' coordination developed and has been sustained more organically. After identifying the topic, we planned a three-day site visit to meet with key individuals and interview them for the case study. All 10 interviewees were involved in the Generation Work leadership in some way or served as peer connectors.

For these interviews, we designed a common protocol in consultation with the Seattle local partnership leadership. Interviews focused on PYD practices, the progress of Generation Work's efforts, and the city-wide effort to coordinate services more effectively. One Child Trends staff member led each interview and another took notes. Transcriptions of the recorded interviews were used in the analysis, as were Child Trends' notes. To complete the analysis, we employed a coding rubric focused primarily on identifying process themes related to *how* coordination increased, as well as outcomes themes related to *what changed* because of increased coordination. This allowed us to better understand the importance of the Generation Work local partnership, how it was organized, and what it achieved.

Findings

Bureaucratic roadblocks prevented partners from reaching more youth in King County, but partnership is one way to jointly work around these challenges and solve problems.

As in many public service settings, bureaucratic processes can make work challenging and slow it down. The State of Washington is no different, and both time and resources are required to navigate within or across many of the systems with which programs and young people routinely interact. For example, a staff member in one Seattle-based organization described how tiring this can be:

There's a lot of bureaucracy that I didn't realize that went into this work, even though I am in direct services. Even getting a piece of paper—even something [like a] transcript or something. I can't do it because I have to go through a different avenue of getting it. And then, when you look further up at the structural way that schools are kind of formed and organized, the people that are more at risk of disengaging and need the most help aren't getting it, and so I think that those things make it more difficult for the young people to pursue other things because that system in and of itself has already failed them.

In addition to this work on the part of program staff, many young people must also navigate complex systems. For example, a participant might need their driver's licenses reinstated or need help navigating the state systems that administer the GED or track child support contributions. Often, participants need help from programmatic staff. One director at ANEW described supporting program participants who need to interact with judges in the criminal justice system:

But the judges will work with us. If we go in with a client and say, 'This person's in pre-apprenticeship, they've showed up every day, they've applied for these apprenticeship programs,' we've had them waive \$15,000 worth of fines. We've had them reinstate licenses. We work very closely with child support. If they've lost their license because of child support, we can get their license reinstated immediately. So we work with those places to get those things. GEDs—we work with different programs to make sure that they can get their GED or high school diploma equivalency during the program—because if they can't get those things accomplished by the time they finish the program and they leave without them, they're likely not going to succeed.

While both examples given above are about individuals navigating complex systems, programs must also work within these bureaucracies. One example that came up multiple times was how organizations work with schools and school districts. Each time they partner with a new school, formal agreements are worked out on a one-by-one basis. One local consultant described the process:

But schools are like lone rangers in the state just like colleges are. There isn't as much of—it's just not a good thing. It's a real lone ranger state, and ... they only have so much power ... So [it's] a big challenge, and I'm sure [a colleague] will say this, you make deal-by-deal deals with school districts. You make deal-by-deal deals with colleges. This is the challenge with all of the providers that have those provider systems as partners.

Ensuring that programs are in compliance with state mandates is another way by which programs spend time and resources. For example, an AJAC leader described this challenge with regard to pre-apprenticeship (programming meant to prepare youth for enrollment in apprenticeships): “So we're an apprenticeship, so our state funding is, [I mean] the mandate is to provide an apprenticeship training program to the state's aerospace and advanced manufacturing industry. So the state funding supports our apprenticeship programs. They don't support our pipeline programs.” However, when different programs came together, they each were able to share effective strategies or lessons learned about navigating the systems.

All of these previous experiences with bureaucratic challenges highlight how partnering can be difficult, time-consuming, or even a wasted effort. Since each partner has its own bureaucratic system, the time spent simply navigating multiple bureaucracies can make it difficult for groups to find and prioritize the time needed to develop partnerships. Unless it is very clear to an organization how a partner can fit into their work and make some of this navigation easier, the partnership can be easy to brush aside. For the key players in Seattle and King County, Generation Work—both its structure and its funding—provided critical motivation that advanced collaboration and partnership.

As partners started to meet and conduct more extensive dialogue, they experienced a greater sense of collaboration and a less competitive environment.

One impact of Generation Work in Seattle was to bring people together and create more structure and accountability for the joint work. As described above, it is easy for programmatic staff to get caught up in the daily work of navigating complex systems and bureaucracies—of which the employment training sector involves many—and exist only in one's silo. Generation Work helped program leaders find areas in which their work overlapped. One leader of Port Jobs described their realization of the level of overlap:

... [I realized that one program] is looking at [reducing] high school drop out ... and [another program] was noticing the needs of people in the airport and [I realized] ... "Oh, we have to work together." ... that was kind of the moment ... where the authentic piece of "we have to work together" comes from ...

Generation Work encouraged many partners to more actively collaborate—a bigger shift for some partners than for others. One leader of a local pre-apprenticeship program described how this approach was natural to them, but that other partners had resisted it in the past:

I can tell you that people thought I was crazy when I moved here because the first thing I did is—there were four pre-apprenticeship programs, and I said, "Look. We're all going to the same events all the time. Why don't we all pitch in 25 percent, hire an outreach person to do this for all of us, because we're nonprofits. We need to work together. We need to stop fighting against each other. There's so much work here. We can't possibly fill this pipeline without working together." They all looked at me like I was nuts, like, "Who is this woman? Why does she want to actually collaborate?"

Generation Work created an opportunity for the aforementioned leader to again approach the partner-oriented work as they had wanted to earlier in their work. In other instances, past experiences also shaped how people approached partnerships. For example, after experiences in which partnerships did not work well, leaders were discouraged from establishing new partnerships that required trust and the meshing of two organizational cultures. One leader at Port Jobs said, "So again, [Generation Work] sort of forced [a] conversation because we're going to pay [another organization] to outstation someone in our office and get really integrated. And we don't do that lightly because, in Port Jobs history, we've done that a few times and it hasn't always worked out well." As the group held itself accountable to meeting more often, members also started to jointly run meetings and share more with each other. A consultant who works closely with the Generation Work leadership team gave specific examples of how this played out:

And so that's an example of collaboration and integration because they wouldn't have known—these grant-funded, small, grant-funded, short-term [projects]—they don't know what's going on. And now they do because there's so much deliberate interaction at these GenWork learning community meetings, at the CCER meetings too that people are really connecting. They're not just sharing, "Oh, we've got a job fair coming up," but they're sharing the fact that, "This grant's ending and this is the hole that it's leaving." And so ... it's [an] outward call to action kind of thing, and I really appreciate that.

This same consultant noted that this increased level of partnership worked because it had become more routine: "I think it's [now] the routine ... because you have to routinize the relationships as well as value them, yeah, I think it's that. I think it's also really trusting and understanding where others have expertise and where they don't. And realizing that the goal isn't just to pile more on, it's to collaborate and integrate..."

The Generation Work meetings and related opportunities to share have led to more joint programming at Port Jobs. AJAC and ANEW have both held job fairs and orientations in the Port Jobs office and NWEA now has a staff member co-located at Port Jobs. This more coordinated effort has allowed many staff members to recognize and more explicitly appreciate the different pathways that their various organizations create, as well as how their joint work creates a larger, more organized, and varied workforce system.

Organizations have become more aware of their own strengths and limitations and how they can find partners that complement their services.

By recognizing their own limitations and acknowledging that partner organizations can fill gaps, the Generation Work partners have embraced a shared vision around how to meet the individual needs of participants in their programs. By more explicitly naming and labeling the different pathways that young people can take, the local partners began to better identify their own strengths and limitations, along with areas in which other organizations could help them fill gaps. As they began to more clearly identify where in this complex array of organizations and systems their organization could meet participants' needs, they

also became better able to quickly identify whether they were trying to expand their own services or scope too much, or where a well-thought-out partnership could strengthen both their services and the system as a whole. And as organizations began to trust each other more, their leaders were increasingly willing to turn to others to fill gaps in their own organizations' capabilities. An AJAC staff member stated this directly when describing a new partnership between their pre-apprenticeship work, a local Boys and Girls Club, and a high school:

We ... recognize that our statewide mandate is to deliver training. And the more that we also try to play that support service role, [it] may not be best suited for us. And also might be enough mission creep that it actually makes it more problematic. So we've really tried to address that through our partnership approach. And that's where ... with [a local high school], I think we have the makings of [a] really good integrated service delivery model ... that's also co-located so that it's right next door to [the high school], so the counselors can come and visit with the youth that they need to. We've got onsite case management, we've got WIOA support services so that actually, like this week, we were making sure that all of those youth are getting work boots so they can go to their OSHA training and their forklift training next week. It doesn't solve the housing issue. We're trying to get a better sense of what food resources exist on [campus] but also the Boys and Girls Club has a lot of resources [so] ... we're also trying to figure out, "Okay. What resources do you guys have? What resources do you [other] guys have?"

A staff member at ANEW also described this awareness, noting that while ANEW does certain things well, the organization relies on others to meet a wide variety of participant's needs:

One of my base core values is we know what we do. Our mission is our mission. We train people to get into construction jobs. We don't do alcohol counseling. We don't do all this other stuff. We do training, and we do it well. So there's other things that we need people to help with. Just like with [name], and having them come in and mentor. I'm always looking for people that can come help the clients succeed more ...

This recognition of their own organizations' strengths and weaknesses has helped practitioners create a greater sense of collaboration in Seattle that is reducing competition between organizations. In many ways, this more integrated system has helped organizations better identify and prevent mission creep. While most people noted that organizations in Seattle had engaged in relatively little competition even before Generation Work, they also noted that partner organizations now actively and intentionally avoid competition and view each other as partners. This increased partnership leads to tangible changes. By working together, organizations can even write stronger grants. Also, as they are better able to understand how each organization can meet the needs of certain subsets of youth and young adults, organizations realize that their competitive advantages make the system as a whole stronger (rather than repetitive or redundant). One staff member at NWEA described to us how their partnership with airport jobs had linked her students who need an income to reliable jobs at the airport.

Organizations' increased openness to partnering and collaborating is one outcome, and indicates a broader recognition that organizations can create a comprehensive and supportive system for young people by working together. With greater movement of information and awareness of who does what, organizations have begun to problem solve at a systems level. Staff members now explicitly acknowledge that they can ask another organization for help. For example, one organization might ask a partner for help with a grant, or another organization might identify a young person who is not ready for a particular training in one trade but could be referred elsewhere to complete their pre-requisite courses. As a result, partners better recognize the additional cost and resources required to holistically support a young person, and have connected young people to partners that are better suited to meet their needs. Partners have also relied on each other to prepare young people to enter a program with the necessary credentials. For example, ANEW has incorporated additional supports to ensure that participants are provided the support they need to succeed (e.g., providing supplies, transportation, etc.) throughout the program:

We serve people that have already overcome some of those barriers. And then we'll take care of transportation. We'll take care of things, so they have tools and clothing and everything that they need.

And we have some housing support [needs], but we find other organizations to do that. So if we have somebody who loses housing, then we have organizations that we refer them to.

As the partnership evolved, the Generation Work partners began to newly appreciate different pathways through which young people could work to meet their individual goals.

Prior to their collaboration, each partner organization primarily spent time thinking about its main area of expertise (i.e., education, pre- or full-apprenticeships, internships, linkages to other resources, etc.). One of the partnership's key tasks was to more publicly acknowledge the many different on-ramps or pathways that young adults can take to successfully reach their goals. This was a major component of Seattle's PYD approach and centered on recognizing how each pathway was important to help meet *each young person's* needs, thereby supporting attainment of their goals. One staff member at AJAC said, "I just think the notion of having options is really appealing." The group's goal to recognize the many available pathways—rather than try to identify one common pathway—was an essential early step. Group members learned more about each other through multiple steps.

First, partners participated in joint training opportunities. These allowed team members to better understand their respective roles and how each organization's role fit into the multiple pathways framework that the partnership was emphasizing. A racial and ethnic equity and inclusion (REEI) training that the local education service district (a localized office of the Department of Education in the State of Washington) organized was one of the first opportunities for joint training. Focusing on an REEI was strategic, as it represented a focal topic for each organization and did not prioritize one pathway, such as apprenticeships, over any other. One staff member said that the training was "instrumental in bringing some of the partners a lot closer together." The REEI training, which also covered a sensitive but important topic, led partners to trust each other more. This was just the beginning of more interaction, as described by one AJAC staff member:

... so the thing that I think that I attribute to Generation Work the most is catalyzing new partnerships. And it seems like there's a lot of kind of the same organizations and faces you find at the table around different grant opportunities that arise, just kind of, in some ways, organically. But it's a matter of the more we work together, the more we understand what each other's needs are, what we can contribute, and where.

A second strategy was for participants to visit each other's programs. The leaders at Port Jobs were particularly interested in partnering with education-focused organizations because they felt that job opportunities at the airport might help young adults who needed employment while they completed courses, training, or degrees. Many young adults, in contrast to teenagers, need ["now jobs"](#) to help them meet their daily needs while they train or complete school. One Port Jobs leader described why site visits were useful:

We would love for [our partners] to come out and see what we do at the airport. And [how] that would help [them] connect young people with the vast array of jobs at the airport for those young people [they're] working with who need to work, not that we're trying to stop anyone from completing high school.

This leader's quote shows that tensions between organizations focused on schooling and those focused on jobs must be addressed outright, but also that, once a common mission was laid out, there was room to coordinate.

A third strategy was to co-locate a staff member from NWEA at Port Jobs. While many partners in Seattle knew of each other and attended meetings together before Generation Work, few had regular, ongoing working relationships with one another. One staff member at Port Jobs commented that previous partnership experiences had not worked well, which had made them tentative about forming new ones. However, by providing both funding and accountability, Generation Work pushed several organizations to

delve deeper into the possible relationships they could have with each other. That same staff member at Port Jobs described this process:

... one might say, "Oh, well, why weren't you guys working more closely together before?" ... [Maybe] we could've brushed up against each other in an earlier Skill Up project [called] Skill Link, but when you don't have skin in the game, it's different. So [Generation Work] sort of forced a conversation because we were going to pay [NWEA] to station someone in our office and get really integrated. And we don't do that lightly because ... we've done that a few times and it hasn't always worked out well. So we worked really closely with NWEA. It was a really open and transparent conversation. The early months of it didn't work so well and we were able to say ... "Okay, guys. This isn't working. We're paying you and it's not working. And so let's figure something out because people aren't getting served and that's what this money is for." We're very interested in people getting served. So all credit to them. They fixed it. And [their staff member] has been absolutely wonderful.

The peer connectors were another resource that local partners relied on to identify different pathways and different organizations that could be a good fit. The peer connectors, who sometimes relate better to their young adult peers, were trained on the different organizations and their respective opportunities. The director of the peer connector program described how these young people act as linkages between multiple different needs and help each individual young person navigate a pathway that works for them:

My goal is to basically make sure that the peer connectors are providing youth with the exposure and also the resources to actually get involved with Generation Work partners. And that's been the biggest thing, like NWEA, AJAC, ANEW, Airport Jobs, making sure that youth are aware of these options and opportunities to move forward with a career.

As key players in the Seattle partnership came to recognize each other and interact more often, several staff members reported attending Generation Work meetings specifically to connect with one another and build relationships. One interviewee said, "I'm a firm believer that relationships are 90 percent of what we do. And, so the more often I can hear about what other people are doing, collaborate with other organizations, and figure out how people can work together, the better off the system becomes." This may not have been many people's attitude before Generation Work, but this attitude is now more common and supported by more structured interactions.

Programs are creating environments that embrace inclusion and openness.

In addition to recognizing that participants' needs vary, Generation Work has maintained an intentional focus on the equity concerns that underly these conversations. One important part of effectively serving all young people is to make sure that youth (who may often lack access points to opportunities) know the different pathways available to them. AJAC is paying particular attention to this when it comes to apprenticeships:

We've also gone through a process of—when we're talking about accessible pathways for young people—[seeking] to include apprenticeships [in the opportunities available to them] and thinking about making those pathways equitable. We have to also consider how "out-of-school" youth and "Opportunity Youth" are able to access those pathways, too. And trying to set it up in such a way with school districts that we've got multiple entry points to meet youth where they're at.

Many direct support staff recognize that their own personal experiences and identities influence how they connect with young people and how the young people experience the supports they offer. Staff who once benefited from programs like the ones in which they now work are able to draw on their personal experiences to guide young people. One peer connector noted that she considers this when connecting young people to opportunities: "He really liked that the teacher was Salvadoran like him. They could talk to each other. And he was like, 'Oh, he's so funny.' He really liked that. And then, he liked that he could work at his own pace, not with everyone around him getting taught the same thing and not being on the same

page.” This connection to a program because of a connection to the teacher, mentor, or leader—whether a result of race, culture, friendliness, or simply personality—is an often undervalued but essential factor of success.

Programs have become more conscious about who they hire. Employment programs have hired instructional and other support staff to make participants feel more comfortable with seeking supports:

My work is 95 percent direct student-facing work. And the other 5 percent is the administrative tasks that come with it. So, of course, it comes down to hiring the right people, so education advocates have a lot of experience with those students' experience. I mean, my family came here as refugees and very low income, [I] was [a] first-generation student myself. So we have staff that have similar experiences to students so it's easier for us to be able to connect with them. We have diverse staff. We have staff from all walks of life.

Staff should also actively convey these values to participants in their programs and ensure that all partners have the same understanding of such values:

They probably want to be able to give you what the initiative is, but what they do know is how to show empathy ... [T]hrough customer service training, we focus on being welcoming, engaging, resourceful, responsible, and empathetic. And so we really want them to know, people that are coming here are looking for a safe haven. It's hard enough to find a job in these times and then you add that layer of being immigrants and refugees and not speaking English as a first language. And just how do you show them empathy? The best thing is that they also are—some are immigrants and refugees that don't speak English. So when somebody comes into your office, they're already feeling welcome because they see somebody that they can identify with and that can speak their language and welcome them. So we really focus on hiring folks that represent the community we serve.

Discussion

As the staff member at Port Jobs noted, working together can be challenging. However, when relationships work well, it becomes easy, in retrospect, to think, “Why didn’t we do this before?” This greater sense of collaboration shifts who people turn to with questions or as potential partners, which further reinforces the collaboration. A Port Jobs staff member described this process overall:

I am really humbled by all of the work that is going on, some of which is directly sparked by Generation Work and some of which is tangential and ... has been going on in various forms [before Generation Work]. But I think Generation Work has helped glue some things together that weren't as glued together before ...

This collective approach to working formed the basis of the Generation Work grant and, unlike some other local partnerships, Seattle’s Generation Work model was less formal. They did not create a new formal partnership between organizations that had not previously worked together. They did not invest large amounts into an ongoing learning community. They did not pick one topic for all partners to discuss. And in contrast to the work in other local partnerships, it was hard to capture exactly *how* their integration happened.

At first, the transition from being more siloed to acting more cohesively seemed almost fluid, without any key guideposts that marked the transition. However, three themes stood out as we explored the interview data. First, it is clear that the funding provided by Generation Work helped hold partners accountable—to each other and to their quarterly meetings—which allowed them to problem-solve and work together. Second, this funding—combined with expectations around supporting adolescents and young adults defined in the PILOT tool—provided concrete affirmation that partners’ new approaches were the right way to work together. Third, in many ways, practitioners and local government officials in King County are already supporting work that is focused on collective impact and breaking down silos. This already-existing

inclination to disrupt siloed work meant that implementing these PYD approaches in Seattle did not require as much partner education to attain buy-in. Thus, by emphasizing the individuality and complementarity of different pathways and the importance of “now jobs,” this partnership expanded its work to create new partnerships and more streamlined pathways for young adults.

Seattle’s story shows how norms can shift in incremental ways through the slow, dedicated work of individuals who are committed to change. The leaders of the Generation Work team in Seattle wanted to use the grant for motivation and accountability to small changes that would ultimately change how they interacted with one another. This came about via small interactions or events. Members attended a training together; they visited each other’s sites; they hosted a joint job fair. However, the more that the Generation Work core team engaged with one another, and the more they used their quarterly check-in meetings to debrief those events, the more those interactions became the norm that defined expectations.

Conclusion

In Seattle, as in all five Generation Work partnership sites, a key task of the grant was to develop a more integrated workforce development system. One important conversation that developed from Seattle’s Generation Work partnership increased organizations’ awareness of the multiple workforce development systems. Unlike the education system or the health care system, young people engaging with the workforce development system interact with schools, apprenticeship sites, other businesses, trainers, housing, health care systems, case managers, and more. In any discussion of the workforce “system,” we must acknowledge that this system represents the intersection of multiple systems related to labor or work. An AJAC staff member discussed how apprenticeship fits with the other initiatives:

... as we've all talked about in other Generation Work meetings—there's no one large workforce development system. It's a series of bifurcated systems that don't—that aren't designed—to work with each other. And the apprenticeship is one of those systems. It largely sits outside from post-secondary, and sits outside from public education, and sits outside from the public workforce system.

In the past, before Generation Work, these multiple systems largely co-existed and ran parallel to each other, sometimes overlapping in both intentional and unintentional ways. Generation Work did not exactly create a new system, but it was able to bring existing systems together to work more effectively in coordination. This happened because of an increased awareness based on new partnership experiences (which can be sustained) and because of the accountability structure that the grant put in place (which was more time-bound). While this work will require continued commitment, and the multiple systems will continue to exist alongside each other, the relationships that the grant fostered will outlast the funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. As other cities seek to develop a more streamlined system, they might consider learning from Seattle’s regular meetings, site visits, co-location of staff, and commitment to multiple pathways.

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