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YouthShift issues *Call for Connection* challenge to improve outcomes for New Orleans Children

New Orleans, LA (December 15, 2015) – After three years of collaboration, YouthShift released its *Call for Connection*, a new publication that details recommendations and data to help youth serving nonprofits and agencies create positive change through closer coordination and alignment. YouthShift was founded in 2012 by a group of nonprofit leaders frustrated by the fact that the needs of the youth they served seemed much greater than what their programs could provide. Since then, YouthShift has transformed into a coalition of allies committed to building a New Orleans in which all young people thrive.

“The needs of New Orleans children and families grow every day,” said Jennifer Roberts, vice president of education for Baptist Community Ministries, an anchor funder for the project and member of the YouthShift steering committee. “In order to best serve our youth and create opportunities for them to be successful, we have to come together with a common vision among the organizations committed to this work. YouthShift’s *Call for Connection* is a roadmap that will move practitioners, policy makers, philanthropists and city agencies forward in a unified way to create a greater impact for youth across the city.”

Key recommendations in the *Call for Connection* include:

- Increase the meaningful engagement between leaders of children and youth-serving organizations, young people and parents themselves.
- Gather more information about the well-being of children and youth in our community and what efforts there are to address the YouthShift priorities. Disseminate this information to the general public.
- Improve the quality of programs that serve children and youth in New Orleans by reinforcing the continued efforts of the K-12 school system, youth development programs and early childhood sectors to define, measure and support quality improvement on an ongoing basis.
- Develop children and youth-centered public policies and strategies to ensure that young people come first in New Orleans.
- Identify and support an organization (or multiple organizations) to provide staffing, technical assistance, resources and expertise to help support organizations seeking to execute these goals.

The *Call for Connection* release coincides with the release of The Data Center’s new *Youth Index*, a statistical snapshot of the well-being of New Orleans children/youth that is designed to inform the development of goals and strategies that can improve outcomes for children/youth age 0 to 24. The *Youth Index* will both inform YouthShift’s work and be used to benchmark YouthShift’s progress each year.

Dr. Tony Recasner, CEO of Agenda for Children, said, “As a founding member of YouthShift, we are proud to be part of an initiative to make New Orleans truly child-centered. YouthShift offers us a framework to make sure that the tireless efforts of our community’s child advocates consistently result in effective, high quality programming that truly meets the needs of young people and their families.”

Contributing partners also expressed support and utility for the project. Todd Battiste, vice president of education with United Way of Southeast Louisiana stated, “Our organization is deep into planning on how to best address poverty in our seven Parish service area. YouthShift provides us with data, strategies and tools for us to facilitate conversations with our stakeholders and develop better, bolder solutions.”

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“YouthShift is a movement to change how we look at working with and for the children and youth of New Orleans,” said Marti Dumas, a steering committee member and parent of public school students. “It’s not enough to have the best interest of youth at heart – we also need to improve the quality of what we do and align it with goals bigger than our organizations or ourselves.”

YouthShift is currently led by a steering committee that is comprised of representatives from the following organizations: Agenda for Children, Baptist Community Ministries, Broadmoor Improvement Association, Children’s Bureau of Greater New Orleans, Communities in Schools, The Cowen Institute at Tulane University, The Forum for Youth Investment (Washington, DC), KID smART, Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights, Louisiana Public Health Institute, Metropolitan Human Services District, New Orleans Health Department, New Orleans Public Library, The Data Center and the University of New Orleans.

To date, YouthShift has engaged over 1,500 individuals and over 190 organizations in its development and will now transition to Community Action Teams focused on each recommendation.

To read the full report or join the movement, visit <http://www.nolayouthshift.org> or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for more information about upcoming events.

About YouthShift New Orleans:

YouthShift is a group of nonprofit organizations pledging to do business differently to improve outcomes for children and youth. Aligned under a common vision and a better understanding of the challenges facing children, youth, and their families, participating organizations have joined in a movement to work better together and improve their direct services so that young people come first in New Orleans.

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