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## From the President



WENDY WHEELER, President,  
Innovation Center for Community  
and Youth Development

Fall is here! Here at the [Innovation Center](#), the new season is already ushering in fresh opportunities for learning and discovery. One of our favorite and most effective strategies is to build learning communities - diverse groups of people who seek innovation at the intersection of their organizations or fields. We firmly believe that this kind of boundary-crossing yields stronger, more robust solutions to today's social issues. I am excited to share a few insights from our most recent work.

## Relationship Education as a Strategy for Teen Pregnancy Prevention

In partnership with [Public Strategies Inc.](#), we convened a two-day gathering of policy and program leaders with expertise in teen pregnancy prevention and relationship education. This meeting, supported by the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#), responded directly to recent health care reform legislation which permits relationship education as a strategy to prevent teen pregnancy and prepare vulnerable youth for adulthood.

The purpose of the meeting was to expand the policy dialogue about relationship education and teen pregnancy prevention services by identifying: opportunities for collaboration between the fields; relevant research and promising practices; current policy and current or upcoming funding opportunities and effective strategies for reaching vulnerable youth with relationship education and pregnancy prevention messages. The conversation centered on five key themes:

- Language matters: Effective communication lies at the heart of any collaborative effort; words have the power to attract or alienate potential allies. Program and policy leaders need clear, compelling, value-neutral ways to describe their work to each other.
- Perspective matters: The process of working through value differences may strengthen emerging partnerships. This conversation demands transparency, flexibility and courage as organizations claim their own perspective, consider alternative points of view, and co-develop a rationale for working together.
- Context matters: Successful programs are cognizant of the multiple influences

### PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

[YouthBuild USA](#)  
[National Healthy Marriage Resource Center](#)  
[Girls, Inc.](#)  
[Catholic Charities](#)  
[Colorado Youth Matter](#)  
[The National Crittenton Foundation](#)  
[The David and Lucile Packard Foundation](#)  
[Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)  
[Boys & Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee](#)  
[Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains](#)  
[Wyman Center](#)  
[Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention](#)  
[Healthy Teen Network](#)  
[Sasha Bruce Youthwork](#)

[Health & Hospital Corporation  
for Marion County  
New Mexico Teen Pregnancy  
Coalition  
Florence Crittenton Services of  
Arizona  
The Ford Foundation](#)

surrounding vulnerable youth. This approach requires adult leaders to engage young people in sharing their stories and articulating their own needs.

- Relationships matter: The act of working across established fields is fundamentally about building relationships; in order to collaborate effectively, agencies must be drawn to each other, engage in a collegial manner, and have confidence that they are mutually invested in joint work.

- Purpose matters: An explicit social justice mandate could potentially unify programs of all kinds - including relationship education and teenage pregnancy prevention - under the banner of creating opportunities that enhance young people's lives.

I was struck by the richness of this discussion and the strong emphasis on social justice. These insights will form the basis of a proceedings paper that is intended to spark ideas and action among program leaders and policymakers who see the potential for a more integrated approach. Please stay tuned for more information about how to access this upcoming publication. In the meantime, check out [Relationships Matter: Strengthening Vulnerable Youth](#), for a discussion of relationship education from a youth development perspective.

As this work moves forward, we would like to expand the dialogue to include an array of voices and perspectives. I encourage you to send this message to colleagues with an interest in teen pregnancy prevention or relationship education. And, as always, please contact me directly if these concepts resonate with your own work. We are always looking for new feedback, ideas, and partners.

Be sure to check out our [practical tools](#) and the [training and consulting services](#) that we offer!

