



## East African Community Design Group September, 2014 to May, 2015

### A Project of the Mission Impact Council

**DESIGN GROUPS:** The Mission Impact Council and East African 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 East African youth.

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

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

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June, 2015

# East African Youth Development & Leadership Opportunities

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

	Issue	Opportunity	Insights
<b>Access</b>	<b>Funding</b>	Create added funding to support already successful programs.	Successful community-based programs can't scale without.
	<b>Communication</b>	Better inform families about existing youth opportunities.	Use informal social network to share about youth development options.
	<b>Transportation</b>	Eliminate transportation as a barrier to youth involvement.	Can be a basic and important obstacle to participation.
	<b>Space</b>	Find more space for after school & summer activities (ComCntr?)	Available spaces are either not large enough or not high quality.
	<b>Special Needs</b>	Want programs to serve all needs-e.g. mental health, autism.	Essential to have more capacity to serve in complicated areas.
<b>Quality</b>	<b>Family Involvement</b>	Find better ways to include, involve, & support families' lead role in youth development.	Families sometimes only trust Faith Centers. Need to be involved and earn their trust. Need child care.
	<b>Sustainability</b>	Find ways to sustain successful youth programs.	Many past examples of successful efforts that disappeared.
	<b>Cultural Competence</b>	Bridge gaps and understanding between East African community and mainstream programs.	Can experience exclusion, cultural discrimination, stereotypes, racism, by appearance or differences.
	<b>Program Quality</b>	Promote added professional development for emerging leaders working with EA youth.	Strong core of youth leaders that could benefit from added training.
<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Faith Centers</b>	Support Faith Centers' capacity to support youth development through faith and culture.	Faith Centers cautious after 9/11. Partnership with others could bring knowledge, credibility and trust.
	<b>Leadership Development</b>	Support East African youth becoming creative problem solvers and leaders in their personal and civic lives.	Youth sometimes disconnected and need to develop commitment to wider community good. Who will be the next generation of leaders?
	<b>Community Learning</b>	Gain access to learning opportunities outside the East African community.	Monocultural charter schools provide needed safety but also need exposure to outside communities.
	<b>Peace Education</b>	Empower approaches that build peaceful integration/ coexistence.	Teach nonviolent change and provide alternatives to gangs.
	<b>Mentoring</b>	Connect educated role models to work with and guide youth.	The right mentors can build leadership responsibility & capacity.
	<b>Government Policy</b>	Need to align what government wants with community needs	Two agendas right now don't always overlap.

# East African Employability Opportunities

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

	Issue	Opportunity	Insights
<b>Access</b>	<b>Program Availability</b>	Need more viable opportunities for job training.	Many adults are unaware of options.
	<b>Funding</b>	More funding for youth jobs—hands-on opportunities that will transfer.	Employability starts early and youth need work experiences to understand careers.
	<b>Employ Mid-Level</b>	Create more opportunities for jobs for mid-level & older adults.	Adult employment is a bridge to youth employment.
	<b>Role Models</b>	Youth need exposure to successful EA adults from diverse professions (their parents may not know language).	Need to find out about diverse jobs and know East Africans that have become successful.
	<b>EA Pipeline to School Jobs</b>	Provide opportunities for EA adults to start as school “paras” and become teachers.	Youth need people they can identify with in the system to support their education and eventual careers.
<b>Quality</b>	<b>Aspirations</b>	Youth need to believe there is a path and a possibility for success & that they know their passion.	Need to believe they can overcome poverty and economic oppression to become all they can be.
	<b>Drop-Out Outreach</b>	Need program for students that have not finished high school and possess few skills.	Not a clear path for these youth to succeed in jobs and life.
	<b>Practical Education</b>	Need schools to provide more practical and relevant education that prepares youth for job market.	Want schools to integrate more career education and experiences into curriculum (including service-learning).
	<b>Outreach</b>	Institutions often hire young, smart EAs to do outreach but may not have experience & skills	Mid-level people that possess extensive networks sometimes forgotten or overlooked.
<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Paren</b>	Support parent knowledge and access to technology so they can help their children’s future	Many parents have no or limited knowledge and access to technology that is critical for jobs.
	<b>Leadership Courses</b>	Offer more leadership training (e.g. self-initiative, problem-solving, creativity) as key to jobs	Enroll youth and emphasize that leadership programs are career preparation opportunities.
	<b>Entrepreneurship Education</b>	Support education for and exposure to entrepreneurship.	Entrepreneurship is a global option for people that find obstacles to accessing the job market.

# East African Educational Opportunities

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

	Issue	Opportunity	Insights
<b>Access</b>	<b>Safety</b>	Need to foster schools where all students feel welcome and safe.	It can be difficult to be one of few East African students in a classroom
	<b>Policy</b>	Eliminate barriers/ policies to support Somali youth that have interrupted education.	Find more ways to support refugee students whose education was interrupted by country conditions.
	<b>Motivation</b>	Help youth understand the importance of education and how to succeed.	Parents see education as the great equalizer and want youth to take advantage of ed. opportunities.
	<b>Disaggregated Data</b>	Disaggregate Somali and East African educational results from larger African American pool	Not possible presently to know clearly how Somali and EA youth are testing on State Exams (MCAs).
<b>Quality</b>	<b>East African Charter Schools</b>	Charter schools are offering a safe cultural & learning space for students to succeed.	Charter schools became even more important when Minnesota cut back on bilingual teachers.
	<b>Achievement/ Opportunity Gap</b>	Although we lack clear data, there is an opportunity gap for East African students as a group.	Children need clearer understanding and support about how to succeed educationally; avoid dropping out.
	<b>Parent Program</b>	Parent Academies are strongly needed but not currently fulfilling the full needs of EA parents.	Past participants in parent academies voiced disappointment over existing programs.
	<b>Partnerships</b>	Partnerships between family, faith and schools are critical to educational success.	In East African culture, the support of faith centers and parents are central to making success possible.
<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Education Staff Diversity</b>	Outside of charter schools, there are few bilingual & bicultural East African teachers or “paras.”	East African youth don’t see or get support from teachers and “paras” from their own culture
	<b>Peer Relationships</b>	Build positive relationships between EA and other ethnicities.	Need to connect and build intergroup understanding/ friendship
	<b>Community Exploration</b>	East African Charter Schools provide a safe learning space but want more ways for their students to explore outside.	Participants are concerned about how their EA students transition to the University of MN and outside world if too cloistered.
	<b>Civic Learning</b>	Want schools to offer more instruction on youth leadership, global ed and civic responsibility.	Need to raise next generation of East African community-minded leaders.
	<b>Global Education</b>	More global education that sees language & culture as assets	Help East African students see their background as a strength.

# East African Health and Wellness Opportunities

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

	Issue	Opportunity	Insights
Access	<b>Healthy Food</b>	Local stores and groceries don't carry healthy foods; fast food is substituted because inexpensive.	Ongoing problem for multiple Twin Cities communities.
	<b>Exercise</b>	Need access to exercise especially for women.	Example: opportunities for single sex swimming hours.
	<b>Code of Silence</b>	Youth taught to respect elders. Limited open communication. More common to not talk about physical & mental health issues.	Females more likely to talk than males; soccer coaches sometimes know youth well/ acts as a hotline.
	<b>Time Outside</b>	Shape definition of wellness that includes time outdoors.	Nasra spreads message that this is good for you and your children; whenever you go out, take the kids with you; make biking normal.
Quality	<b>Stress</b>	Lack of education about how young can deal with stress.	Older generation has more supports including stronger spirituality.
	<b>Technology</b>	Heavy use of technology can interfere with active lifestyle.	Universal problem in today's world; how to set effective limits.
	<b>Shisha</b>	Young attracted to smoking shisha (water pipe for tobacco)	Difficult to change because of strong social and cultural attraction.
	<b>Mental Health</b>	Educate community and give more skills to deal with these issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to find professionals that have cultural competence and ways to work with;</li> <li>• Reframe PTSD as health issue (versus behavioral or racial issue).</li> </ul>
	<b>Vocabulary</b>	Only two words for mental health in Somali—"normal" and "crazy"	Don't have words for mood disorder, depression, etc. Means there can be heavy shaming.
Purpose	<b>Cultural Vision/ Definition of Health</b>	Need to shape our own cultural definition of wellness; not allow others to impose their definition.	Definition that worked in East Africa may not work in America (e.g. "same diet as in Somalia but walked everywhere so stayed healthy")
	<b>Mosque as Wellness Center</b>	Find ways to use the Mosque to promote and provide for wellness; connect exercise and faith together.	Families will listen to Iman.
	<b>Mind and Body</b>	Promising class being offered with yoga, stress relief, music, drumming, and DANCE	U. of MN mind-body center act as partner; dancing is part of cultural identity and embraced by women

# East African Diversity Opportunities

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

	Issue	Opportunity	Insights
Access	<b>Cultural Competence Training</b>	Long list of those that need more cultural competence to avoid “cultural collisions:” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business Human Resources</li> <li>• Youth-Serving Organizations</li> <li>• School Teachers</li> <li>• Public Institutions</li> </ul>	Life opportunities for East Africans limited when mainstream institutions have embedded prejudices & are not culturally competent—can hurt education, youth participation, employment, and even shopping!!
	<b>Education</b>	Not have East African teachers that can connect, be a role model and teach East African history.	Youth often don’t have strong knowledge of their roots and their nation.
	<b>Spectrum of Diversity</b>	Need to understand diversity within East African community (e.g. new refugees versus 3rd generation)	Common problem with immigrant populations; people want to reduce to one narrative.
Quality	<b>Collaborations</b>	How does the EA community partner with the mainstream to build cultural understanding?	Example: Blaisdell YMCA working with East African community.
	<b>Cultural Preservation</b>	People want to preserve faith, stories, culture.	Elder storytelling is one powerful way to teach young.
	<b>Language</b>	Importance of preserving language.	See language as opportunity and asset, not obstacle, for identity and global competence.
	<b>Strengths</b>	Find more ways to celebrate strengths and accomplishments of Somali community here in TC.	Global Muslim geopolitical issues can color how everyone is seen.
Purpose	<b>Reverse Prejudice</b>	Parents need education too; may have same distrust of others.	Can have stereotypes of whites and others and pass along to youth.
	<b>Create Cultural and Resources Map</b>	Need to shape our own maps of service providers that “get” East African culture.	Service providers are very uneven in what they know about East African experiences and culture.
	<b>Intercultural Communication</b>	Need for facilitated intercultural courageous conversations	Sponsor programs that bring East African and non-EA youth together
	<b>Exposure Outside the Community</b>	East African youth can attend mainstream events, but may feel overwhelmed, isolated, and not fully participate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non EA youth need more training in cultural competence.</li> <li>• East African youth need more effective and safe opportunities to get exposure to other cultures</li> </ul>