

Building Futures Educational Initiative Proposal

Recently President Obama stressed in his speech to the nation that dropping out of school is no longer an option. He stated that "It's not just quitting on yourself; it's quitting on your country -- and this country needs and values the talents of every American." The economy of our country is at stake if we do not increase our graduation rate. In the recent book called *The Race Between Education and Technology* written by Drs. Goldin and Katz, they note that in 1950, 59% of the workforce consisted of dropouts while college graduates comprised only 8%. By 2005 this shifted to where high school dropouts comprised only 8% of the workforce, those with some college 29%, and college graduates accounted for 32%. This shift in our economy indicates that dropping out is no longer an option that our country can afford.

According to the John Hopkins' study done on Boston 6th graders (1996-2006), 6th graders who had less than 90% only had an 18% graduation rate. Because of this startling statistic and even though BUYF started in 1992, we decided to solely focus on middle school truants and early intervention to increase the city's graduation rate and improve college access. Our mission still applies to this population: help high-risk, low-income, minority youth develop spiritually, emotionally, academically, and economically.

The following research studies highlight how truancy and dropouts affect the city of Boston.

- Manhattan Institute of Social Research found that Boston has a 52% graduation rate ranking it 84th out of 100 urban school districts surveyed.
- In the Diploma Counts 2008 study, Boston resides in the lowest graduation rate among Congressional Districts in the Commonwealth—a dismal 54%.
- Northeastern Office of Labor Study states
 - that the average income of a high school dropout is \$16,000; and
 - 52% of African-American and Hispanic/Latino males who dropout ends up in prison by the time they are 30 years old.
- The net result is that Massachusetts taxpayers pay an average of \$455,354 per dropout based on loss of income tax, enrollment in government assistance programs, and incarceration costs.

These statistics are overwhelming and full of despair. BUYF believes that dropouts have profound lack of hope and vision for their future. When a child begins to fall behind academically in middle school or sooner, the sense of failure accumulates. Without intervention, the result of not attending school and dropping out is poverty, prison, or potential violent death. BUYF has identified a vicious cycle of despair that leads to joblessness, violence, and death. The steps include:

- Lack of Hope & Vision
- Truancy
- Pulled to Street
- Dropout / Lack of Skills
- Jobless / Violence / Death



BUYF knows that dropping out of high school is barrier to economic stability. With our intervention, chronically truant middle schoolers can get off the path of poverty and crime. The Parthenon Group¹ studied BPS students and identified four indicators that lead to dropping out: late entrant English Language Learner (ELL), Special Education, one more 8th grade risk factors (attendance below 80%, 2 or more years overage, and failed multiple courses), and the fourth doesn't apply here and that is failed 9th grade courses. BUYF recognizes that these truant youth are high risk and have most barriers identified by Parthenon. The BUYF truant youth have risk factors of that of 45% are Overage, 70% have attendance below 85% and 50% have failed multiple courses.

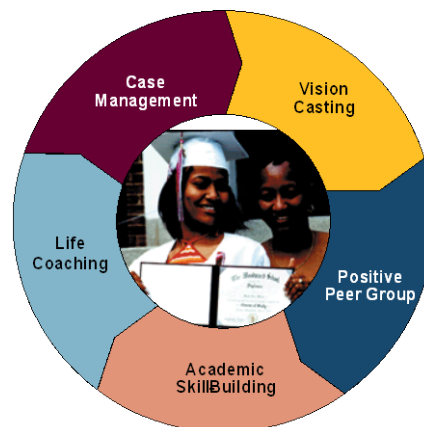
BUYF has over 15 years of experience working with high risk youth in Boston. Over the last four years, we have had a 50% reduction in truancy at assigned BPS schools; 87% of Building Futures students get promoted to the next grade; 40 BUYF alumni are enrolled in college; and 54 BUYF alumni had graduated from college. According to the John Hopkins study, these successes originally had an 18% chance of graduating high school

Building Futures Educational Initiative Program

BUYF created Building Futures Educational Initiative to be in partnership with BPS schools and serve at-risk truant youth in-school, after-school, and in the summer through a youth development, case management approach. BUYF partners with individual Boston public schools to determine the most high risk truant middle schoolers. Our Life Success Coaches (LSC) have offices in the BPS schools and develop trusting relationships with the truant students through home visits, daily check-ins at school, goal setting sessions, weekly CLUB meetings, service projects, college tours. and other after-school and summer programs.

To deconstruct the school-to-prison/poverty pipeline **Building Futures Educational Initiative** has a program methodology of:

1. **Case Management** – *insuring that young people don't fall through the cracks*
2. **Vision Casting** – *casting a vision for themselves and their futures*
3. **Positive Peer Group** – *providing an alternative peer group for positive support*
4. **Academic Skill-Building** – *individual assessment, tutoring, and intensive planning for success*
5. **Life Coaching** – *caring adult engaging the life of high risk youth*



Our Building Futures Educational Initiative is the only school partnership program that begins in middle school to address truancy and potential school failure by providing a comprehensive continuum of services year round to high risk minority youth.

This current school year, BUYF is at three middle schools serving 350 truant students. Due to diligent and increased tracking this school year, BUYF has had remarkable success of reducing truancy. In previous years, we have reduced truancy by 40%. This year we have reduced it by 68%!

¹ The Parthenon Group, “Strategic Planning to Serve Off-Track Youth”, September 2007

Number of Youth Served

School Year

2008-2009: 350

2009-2010: 600

Demographics of BUYF Youth

74% African-American

26% Hispanic/Latino

Multiple Risk Factors for Dropping Out

- 70% History of Truancy (15+ absences)
- 30% DSS involved
- 45% Court involved (CHINS)
- 30% Gang-involved
- 80% Chronic difficulties in school
- 40% Overage for grade level

Truant students are identified in sixth grade and receive extensive help and coaching during their middle school years. Once in high school, BUYF participants can choose to continue to be mentored through graduation and into college. **BUYF has a success rate of 68% reduction in truancy among those served versus a 7% truancy reduction rate for students who didn't participate in the BUYF program.**

Boston Public Schools announced a reorganization of schools earlier this year. BUYF and BPS have met several times to decide on which schools BUYF should partner with and track long-term outcomes. One of the schools BUYF currently works is changing to an interview based school: Lewenberg in Mattapan. BUYF will work at 5 schools next school year: Dearborn in Roxbury, Umana in East Boston, Mildred Ave. K-8 in Mattapan, Gavin in South Boston, and Harbor in Dorchester. It is unclear if the Harbor will remain a middle or change to a 6-12 school. The 600 students will be selected based on incoming 6th grade repeater attendance, 5th grade attendance for new 6th graders, and last year's attendance for the 7th and 8th graders at the school. BUYF will prioritize based on need and severity of truancy. Within this list of truant students, the school staff will provide BUYF with a list of students who are in DSS/Foster Care. Foster Care students tend to have lower attendance. The partnered schools and BUYF will agree on the 600 truant student

caseload before the school year starts in September.

The **Building Futures Educational Initiative (BFEI)** program model is an in school/after school, year round support for its program participants with partnership from BPS schools. The methodology includes case management, life coaching, positive peer group experiences, vision casting, and academic and economic skill building.

1. **Case Management:** With the support of school staff and parents, Life Success Coaches build close ties to youth through tracking, intensive planning, academic assessment, and individual counseling. This allows each student to set a long-term graduation plan (put into an agreement) and meet educational goals.
2. **Life Coaching:** Participants are matched with BUYF Life Success Coaches for long-term support. They assist youth with goal-setting, goal-achieving, and leadership skills. They help young people cope with crises and make good decisions that will lead to positive futures.
3. **Positive Peer Group Experiences:** To build positive relationships with others, Building Futures hosts leadership seminars, "Weekly Club", college tours, weekend activities, summer camp, the Future Leaders Pipeline, and local student-led community service projects.
4. **Vision Casting:** Life Success Coaches and peer mentors work with each student to "cast a personal vision" for the future. Participants are taught to reflect on whom they are, what gifts they possess, and what the future can hold for them. A combination of relationships with caring adults, academic skill building, trips, camps and college tours helps each student create plans and goals for the future.
5. **Academic and Economic Skill Building:** Building Futures works with teachers to increase students' academic skill building, and to assess and improve academic skills. We provide individual assessment, tutoring, homework assistance and intensive planning for success in school. The LSCs become the student's advocates and mentors so that the high risk students sees the importance of education and instill hope and positive futures into their lives.

Case Management and Life Coaching Activities: Once a student is on our caseload they have daily (in-school) contact with BUYF staff who check in and talk with him/her and review goals, celebrate accomplishments, and make new plans. Staff meet with kids during electives (1st period through after lunch) and have a presence during all lunch periods. They review student's attendance patterns for current and past semesters and talk with teachers and Guidance Counselors to get a full understanding of student's academic performance, behavior, attendance, and anything else that might impact their success. The Life Success Coaches offer support and concrete assistance in developing strategies to help kids get to school, arrive on time and complete academic assignments; creating first daily, then weekly goals.

Academic and Economic Skill Building Activities: After school BUYF helps youth in a variety of ways. We offer homework assistance and tutoring in the computer labs on site at the schools or at BUYF offices. If the child needs more intense assistance, BUYF staff will accompany them to specific tutoring offered by their teachers. Citizen's Schools is at the Mildred Ave., Gavin, and Umana schools to offer extended day help and classes. Citizen's Schools and BUYF will work together to increase student academic success. By participating in Citizen's Schools, the youth will be in a safe environment until 4:30pm. At the other schools, we have the students participate in the school sponsored tutoring.

BUYF will sponsor summer job site tours for the Building Futures participants. We will help students fill out job applications, prepare them for a job interview, and follow-up on their summer job opportunities. To teach the students about financial literacy, we play online stock market simulation using The Stock Market Watch. This will teach the youth different opportunities to make money and get out of poverty.

Vision Casting and Positive Peer Experiences Activities: BUYF takes the Building Futures youth on college tours, in-state and out-of-state, to cast a positive vision for their future. Throughout the year, we have the youth attend college tours, apply for summer jobs, participate in Futures Leaders Pipeline, go to overnight camp in New York, and serve others in domestic and international service projects. The Future Leaders Pipeline is a series of BUYF sponsored leadership development activities. We hold leadership seminars, service projects, community mapping projects, job interview skills building, and resume writing skills workshops. These activities teach the truant youth how to obtain a positive future. The college tours and service projects bring together these Building Futures students in a positive setting so they learn to interact with others in a respectful manner. The number of activities that we have the youth participate in are aimed to cast a new vision to motivate and equip the at-risk youth with skills and supports needed to complete high school and attend college.

BUYF wants to show the students what their future could look like if they stayed in school. Based on our history, we see drastic change in truant youth when they see a positive future and have the confidence and support to make good choices. Most of these students don't have positive role models in their life or see family and friends succeed in school. BUYF shows them that that education and knowledge are the paths out of poverty and a life filled with crime and violence.

Because BUYF staff are truly committed to getting to know kids as whole people, they learn about the youth's interests and talents and connect them to community resources ranging from sports teams to organizing job site visits. LSC make home visits to check on the truant student and are scheduled whenever it works best for the families – sometimes during school, sometimes after school, and sometimes in the evening for parents who are working all day. As we establish trust and work with kids to meet those daily goals, the youth become a part of a larger caring community, which constantly affirms their value. As daily attendance, academic achievement, knowledge base and skill slowly evolves, the feelings of success and mastery of skills and life choices are

commended and celebrated. BUYF Life Success Coaches provide the students with concrete positive information about how education can improve their future. We help them apply for summer jobs, and make real life connections between learned skills and employment. The goal is that the youth will be able make self discoveries of what kind of man or woman they wish to grow up to be, and what career path they will explore.

Program Objectives, Outcomes, and Evaluation Plan

Over the long term, BUYF wants to work with Boston Public Schools to reduce the number of dropouts by half. BUYF has developed a 4-year business plan to expand and replicate its Building Futures program in order to serve more high risk youth. There are approximately 3200 truant middle school students each year, and in year 4 (2011-2012 school year), BUYF will serve 1800 students. Boston Urban Youth Foundation understands that the root cause of youth not attending school is their lack hope and vision. Strength of BUYF's methodology is its relational approach combing youth development and case management in partnership with BPS schools. BUYF serves at-risk youth at school, after-school, weekends, and in the summer.

For the current 2008-2009 School Year, BUYF has partnered with three Middle Schools: Dearborn in Roxbury, Lewenberg in Mattapan, and the Mario Umana in East Boston. After the second term, BUYF has achieved an 68% reduction in truancy among all those served. BUYF is serving 350 middle school truants. Next school year, BUYF plans to be at the Dearborn and Umana again, move staff to Mildred Ave., and launch our program at the Gavin Middle in South Boston and at the Harbor 6-12 school.

1. To improve school engagement, attendance, and performance of the 600 chronically truant youth;

Outcomes

- a. Reduce truancy by 40% of the 600 students served
 - b. Have at least 85% of Building Futures participants promote to the next grade
 - c. Decrease behavioral problems of the 600 truant youth by 50%
2. Target the high risk chronic truants and empower them with long term supports, tools, and skills needed to achieve educational success and job security; and

Outcomes

- a. Hold a quarterly workshops on financial literacy
 - i. Use The Stock Market Watch – online stock market simulation to teach the students about the stock market
 - b. Hold weekly CLUB meetings to emphasize positive peer experience and vision casting
 - c. Prepare students for summer jobs
 - i. BUYF will take the program participants on job site tours
 - ii. BUYF will prepare students for job interviews and help them fill out applications
3. To improve graduation rates and college access for the high risk minority youth

Outcomes

- a. Have at least 60% of the truant kids participate in tutoring activities throughout the year
 - i. Several schools have a partnership with Citizen's Schools. BUYF youth can receive tutoring help and participate in academic enrichment activities after school.
- b. Hold College Opportunity workshops twice a year
 - i. Talk about the importance of college both on an employment and social development level
 - ii. Show students different college options: local community colleges, vocational schools, traditional residential 4-year colleges
 - iii. Talk about scholarship opportunities, explain what a FAFSA is, and what are the steps to receive financial aid

- c. Have 8th Building Futures participants go on local college tours to see firsthand what college is like and the process of applying to college

To measure outcomes, BUYF tracks the chronically truant middle students' attendance, academics, and behavior on weekly logs. As part of the collaboration agreement each school signs, BUYF has access to their youth's records. The Life Success Coaches report weekly on the truant youth's attendance and activity participation. From the weekly charts, the LSC decides which students on their caseload are critical and conduct home visits and meet with them one-on-one more frequently. BUYF is working with BPS to develop a mechanism to track BUYF participants from middle school to high school graduation.

Evaluation Strategies to Measure Outcomes

- Life Success Coaches will conduct follow-up analysis of truancy for Building Futures participants
- BUYF track and analyze average daily attendance (ADA) data to assess whether and in what ways participants improve attendance.
- BUYF analyze data on participants admitted before January 1 vs. those admitted after. The former group reduces truancy to a much higher degree. In fact, the main reason to admit youth after January 1 is to build a relationship and set goals so that they can participate effectively in the next year.
- At the end of each academic year, BUYF will analyze grades and behavioral/disciplinary data for all participants.
- BUYF will examine more long-term indicators of progress, such as the Building Futures youth's attitude toward education, conversations around careers and their future, and attendance at nonschool BUYF activities.

Successes

Since 1992 BUYF has had a tremendous impact on high-risk youth and our early intervention program model has a proven track record: BUYF was highlighted twice in the Catalogue for Philanthropy as one of 100 excellent non-profit organizations in Massachusetts, and listed in the Pathways to College Network CD-ROM as an exemplary program that gets low-income minority students into college. Both the 2005 report commissioned by the Boston High Risk Youth Network and the Harvard Graduate School of Education's 2003 study identified BUYF as an exemplary truancy reduction program that should be examined and replicated. BUYF was chosen for 2004 Edvestors Showcase, 2008 Winning Strategies Showcase sponsored by Charles Hamilton Houston Institute and Sullivan & Cronwell, and as a 2007 Social Innovator for Reducing Violence.

Our successes since 2001 are as follows:

- At least 500 Building Futures students have graduated from high school.
- 40 Building Futures participants attend college.
- 54 participants have graduated from college.
- 1 BUYF alumni has graduated from Law School.

Our BUYF alumni hold leadership positions as Assistant Headmaster at a local elementary school, State Street Corporation Internship Coordinator, Boston Firefighter, Boston Public School teachers, Entrepreneurs as barbershop owners and construction company managers, and Youth workers at Boston Youth Organizations.

Conclusion

Boston Urban Youth Foundation does instill hope, vision, and positive futures into the lives of these high risk youth. BUYF improves school engagement, attendance, and performance so that these chronically truant middle schoolers graduate high school and attend college. Support from the Global Giving American Open will make dropping out not an option for young people in Boston more of a reality.

"BUYF takes a significant step toward empowering urban communities and schools to actively engage in the social and academic experiences of their youth...The *Boston Urban Youth Foundation* exists as the only community-based organization in Boston that recognizes the important partnership with schools in the quest to combat truancy and the alarming dropout rate among youth."

Harvard Case Study