

**Building the Capacity for Seattle University  
to partner with the Yesler Community Collaborative  
May 2015**

In only four years, the Seattle University Youth Initiative (SUYI), a collaborative effort between Seattle University and many community partners, has begun to experience success in improving education for children and youth from Yesler Terrace and the surrounding neighborhood. Through SUYI children whose families are living in poverty are engaged in new extended learning programs, summer learning and school-based activities. Parents are accessing new services to support their children and once struggling schools are now improving. Hundreds of Seattle University students and faculty are learning while serving at dozens of neighborhood sites. This is good news.

But a fundamental challenge to continued success is the rapid physical and demographic changes occurring in central Seattle. Seattle University has made a long-term commitment to low-income families in its neighborhood, but in less than a decade many of these families may no longer be able to afford to live in the neighborhood and send their children to neighborhood schools. Without stable affordable housing, without access to high quality health care, without jobs that pay a livable wage, many of these families will be forced to leave the neighborhood and the Seattle University Youth Initiative will not have reached its full potential.

The Yesler Community Collaborative (YCC), led by Doris Koo, is addressing this challenge by uniting local residents and other community leaders from many sectors in pursuit of a common vision of a livable and equitable greater Yesler neighborhood. YCC is igniting the imagination of local and national funders about the possibility of creating a national model for other communities to draw upon.

With eight distinct colleges and schools representing many academic and professional disciplines and several university-wide interdisciplinary centers, Seattle University is well positioned to partner with YCC. Seattle University recently received a multi-year grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Through this investment of \$400,000 (\$100,000 per year for four years), Seattle University's Center for Service and Community Engagement (CSCE) will significantly expand the capacity of Seattle University to promote the collective voice, vibrancy and sustainability of the Yesler neighborhood as part of the YCC.

Through this investment, CSCE will connect and build the capacity of University academic and programmatic units to partner with YCC's six working groups: (1) creative placemaking, (2) economic opportunity, (3) education, (4) the environment, (5) health care, and (6) housing. CSCE will specifically engage key leaders of various University academic and programmatic units in explorations of how they might further connect the University's teaching, research and service efforts to the YCC's ambitious neighborhood vision. Specific activities will include:

1. **Community Organizing.** CSCE will provide YCC with support in bringing together local residents, leaders, and SU faculty, students and staff in a comprehensive collective impact effort focusing on the promotion of an equitable neighborhood for all residents.
  - a. **Introductory Meetings.** We will facilitate 20 introductory meetings per year between Seattle University faculty and staff and YCC staff and organizational partners. Depending on the outcome of these meetings, participants might be encouraged to participate in a walkabout.
  - b. **Walkabouts.** We will coordinate four half-day neighborhood walkabouts each year of this investment. The walkabouts, engaging 4 to 10 people per session, will focus on one of YCC's specific issue area. Depending on their interests and skills, individuals who participate in the walkabouts might be invited to participate in an immersion.
  - c. **Immersion.** We will coordinate seven multi-day immersions including three immersions in year one, three immersions in year two, and two immersion in year three. Each experience will engage 10-15 participants (half from the University and half from the wider community) and be shaped around one of YCC's specific issue areas and provide participants with an opportunity to learn experientially from neighborhood residents, community leaders and each other. These experiences will also help forge strong working relationships between the participants.
2. **Research and Evaluation Project.** CSCE will provide YCC and its partners with timely information to make informed choices and also evaluate the impact of various strategies and investments.
  - a. During the first year of the investment, CSCE will develop a clearinghouse of research questions and evaluation projects arising from the YCC issue areas and a mechanism for University faculty and students to respond to these questions by using a variety of research tools. We anticipate that the clearinghouse will lead to 5-10 research and evaluation projects per year. In some cases these might be faculty led projects and in others cases the projects might be student-led service-learning or research projects. In order to assist with the development of quality projects and foster a community of learning, we will host quarterly roundtable discussions for campus and community partners.
  - b. In order to connect campus and community leaders around these projects we will host a series of neighborhood introductory meetings, walkabouts and multi-day immersions exploring specific neighborhood topics (See #1 above).

**3. Incubation of Innovative Ideas.** CSCE will assist with the scoping and piloting of projects that connect University academic and programmatic units to YCC partners to address the six YCC issue areas.

- a. In the initial two years of the investment we will look to incubate and support the piloting of projects. In order to connect campus and community leaders around these projects we will host a series of introductory meetings, neighborhood walkabouts and multi-day immersions exploring specific neighborhood topics (See #1 above).
- b. During the final two years of the investment we will partner with campus and community leaders to embed the most significant projects into University academic and co-curricular programs. Beginning in year two, we will offer a Faculty Fellows Program to intensively engage our most talented and interested faculty in working to embed these projects. This proposal only includes funding for three fellows. We hope to identify additional funding sources to expand the number of faculty fellows. During the final year of the grant we plan to disseminate our lessons learned. This will include presenting at regional and national conferences and creating an anthology of project descriptions and research papers to share with other institutions and communities.

**4. Building Capacity for Collective Impact.** During years three and four of the investment, the University will engage YCC leadership and neighborhood partners in exploring key principles and practices for strengthening and sustaining a collective impact effort. We will engage YCC and neighborhood partners in reading groups on collective impact, facilitate discussions at YCC quarterly meetings, and provide scholarly expertise in possible models to sustain the YCC partnerships into the future.

While promising, Seattle University's partnership with YCC is an experiment. There is much we will learn about what works, what does not work and what is replicable in other contexts. This effort will naturally lead to the identification of gaps that require additional investments of resources. We also will learn more about the ideal role of the University in the Yesler Community Collaborative beyond the duration of the grant. Finally, the catalyzing force of the University partnering with YCC will provide a model for other neighborhood collaboratives and universities within Seattle and around the nation.