

Final

A Strategic Vision for



the Mary and Frances Youth Center at Virginia Commonwealth University

November 2012

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recent implementation of the university's new strategic plan, *Quest for Distinction*, presented the opportunity to consider the strategic future of the Mary and Frances Youth Center (MFYC or Center). A team of VCU faculty, staff and community partners with expertise in youth development engaged in a strategic planning process that involved the examination of current programmatic offerings, stakeholders' perspectives on community needs and assets, and the work of other universities that focus on youth development. Significant findings from this work indicated that:

1. The MFYC can build on key strengths including its unique window on higher education provided via the structural and physical location of the MFYC at VCU and strong university-community collaborations.
2. There are gaps related to community youth programming needs that include:
 - a. Youth STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) training, resources and supports;
 - b. Supports for youth orientation to and aspirations for higher education;
 - c. Access to quality training for youth-serving professionals; and
 - d. The enhancement of parent engagement.
3. There are opportunities to expand upon the initial success of the tennis and life skills program that the MFYC already offers through the Lobs & Lessons program.

The committee recommended a vision that:

The Mary and Frances Youth Center will be a national leader in university-community collaboration for positive youth development.

The committee also suggested that all programs of the Center should lead toward this vision and align with the mission:

The Mary and Frances Youth Center provides programming and training to enhance the lives of youth in the Richmond metro area.

The Principles and Values (Creed) that guide our work:

The Mary and Frances Youth Center

- ***empowers youth to broaden their expectations in life;***
- ***inspires youth to identify and engage their talents; and***
- ***supports youth in strengthening their life skills.***

The committee further recommended that the MFYC:

- Explore the opportunity to become a local and regional youth training resource for youth program quality and youth development professionals;
- Become the programmatic home and structural point of access for Discovery@VCU and other youth development programs at VCU and that revised programs focus primarily on underserved youth and their connection to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) pipelines; and,
- Enhance the current Lobs & Lessons program to include stronger parental engagement.

INTRODUCTION

This vision for the Mary and Frances Youth Center has been developed within the context of Virginia Commonwealth University's strategic plan, *Quest for Distinction*. *Quest* includes a strong commitment to community engagement, including a specific focus on the success of middle school students. VCU has been frequently acknowledged for its work in community engagement. It has been named to the President's Higher Education COMMUNITY SERVICE HONOR ROLL and is classified as a highly community-engaged university by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

As we implement *Quest*, the Mary and Frances Youth Center (MFYC) is a central asset and key opportunity. With the support of a team of VCU faculty, staff and community partners with expertise and strong commitments in the areas of positive youth development, assessment and evaluation, community service and fund development, the Mary and Frances Youth Center is poised to become a hallmark of our *Quest* and our collective commitment to discovery, impact and success.

This report summarizes the recent strategic planning process for the MFYC and proposes an enhanced vision for the future. Two new initiatives that align with *Quest* and make unique contributions to the community are identified. In addition, a set of goals and objectives for further development of the flagship program, Lobs & Lessons, is presented.

THE MARY AND FRANCES YOUTH CENTER: BACKGROUND

A STRONG FOUNDATION

The Mary and Frances Youth Center opened its doors in September 2007 through the generous donation of Michael and Elizabeth Fraizer and was named in honor of their mothers, Mary Fraizer and Frances Royer. Since its opening, the Center has provided the home for several programs focused on improving educational and other positive developmental outcomes for Richmond's underserved youth. The Center's flagship program **Lobs & Lessons** promotes education and life skills through the sport of tennis for underserved elementary and middle school children through afterschool and summer enrichment programs. The majority of participants in Lobs & Lessons have been youth from Richmond Public Schools (RPS). Of the RPS student population, 83% are African American, 80% qualify for free/reduced lunch and many live in impoverished neighborhoods with a single parent. In 2010-11, 347 youth participated in Lobs & Lessons through afterschool programming (117), and summer programming (230). In 2011-12, 168 youth participated in the afterschool program, of which, 120 were elementary, 42 middle school and 6 high school students. Community Partners for Lobs & Lessons include:

- Carver Elementary School;
- Carver-VCU Partnership;
- Communities in Schools -Richmond;
- Higher Achievement - Richmond;
- NDUTIME;
- North Richmond YMCA;
- Police Athletic League;
- Peter Paul Development Center;
- Richmond Redevelopment Housing Authority;
- St. Andrew's School; and
- William Byrd Community House.

A second program of the MFYC is **S.E.E.D. (Science. Exercise. Explore. Develop.)**, a four-week, summer enrichment program for rising sixth-grade students that builds understanding and excitement around a vast array of health careers and biological sciences, while providing tutoring in the core subjects of math and reading. S.E.E.D. has been funded through a grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), began at VCU in 2008 and currently serves 40 students each year. S.E.E.D. is one of the popular programs featured in the VCU Health Careers Pipeline that aims to educate and excite students about careers in the health sciences; provide resources to strengthen students' academic skills in math, science and verbal and written communication; and ensure informed decision-making while pursuing the health career of their choice.

In addition to Lobs & Lessons and S.E.E.D., **The College Place-Richmond**, is located at the MFYC. The College Place is one of four college information centers established by the ECMC Foundation focused on increasing college access among underserved populations through workshops and individualized counseling.

REFINING OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE – A STRATEGIC FOCUS

The Mary and Frances Youth Center, with its focus on positive outcomes of underserved youth, is well-positioned to become a hallmark of VCU's strategic plan, *Quest for Distinction*. Quest emphasizes the qualities of discovery, impact and success – qualities that are already embedded in the principles of the Mary and Frances Youth Center. The strategic planning work began with an emergent vision for the Center, that *the Mary and Frances Youth Center would be a critical hub for both direct training and programming to support underserved children in the Richmond region, as well as a national model for effective out-of-school programs.*

To provide focus to this vision, a Strategic Planning Task Force was formed in December 2011. The goal for the group, which was guided in its work by Dr. Susan Wilkes, an adjunct faculty member at VCU and a professional leadership consultant, was to develop a strategic plan for the Center that builds upon its strong foundation, refine and focus its vision, and provide new opportunities for university and community support. The following individuals served on the Strategic Planning Task Force:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
Melissa L. Abell	Associate Professor, School of Social Work, VCU
Kevin Allison	Academic Assistant to the President, Professor of Psychology, Associate Dir. Clark-Hill Institute for Positive Youth Development, VCU
Karen Altic	Director of Children's Services, William Byrd Community House
Alicia Aroche	Communications and Community Engagement Advocate, Bridging Richmond, VCU
Sandra Booth	Manager of Community Initiatives, United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg
Tina Carter	Director, Mary and Frances Youth Center, VCU
Erika Dumke	Director, VCU Division for Health Sciences Diversity, VCU
Joe Grover	President, Richmond Tennis Association; Co-chair, Lobs & Lessons Advisory Council
Elizabeth Fraizer	Founding Donor
Catherine Howard	Vice Provost for Community Engagement
Damon Jiggetts	VP of Operations, Communities in Schools of Richmond
Samantha Marrs	Senior Associate VP for Development and Alumni Relations, VCU
Wendy Northup	President, Prevention Opportunities, LLC
Joann Richardson	Associate Prof., Health and Human Performance, VCU School of Education
Jamie Stillman	Director of External Relations, Office of the Provost, VCU

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The Task Force met three times during the January-March 2012 timeframe and was supported through presentations based on information collected by the consultant, center director and a graduate assistant. A thorough assessment of community and university stakeholders was conducted through individual interviews and focus group sessions. (Survey Tool: Appendix A) Each stakeholder provided valuable input on their perceptions of the Mary and Frances Youth Center's current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as part of this SWOT analysis. In addition, feedback was provided on critical needs and ideas for future initiatives. All members of the current MFYC staff participated in a separate focus group session. Parents of Lobs & Lessons participants from the William Byrd Community House and St. Andrew's School were also surveyed for their input. (Survey Tool: Appendix B) The following stakeholders participated in interviews or focus group sessions:

Community Partners:

- Boys and Girls Club
- Carver Elementary School
- Communities in Schools of Richmond
- Higher Achievement- Richmond
- North Richmond YMCA
- Peter Paul Development Center
- Richmond Redevelopment Housing Authority
- St. Andrew's School
- William Byrd Community House

Virginia Commonwealth University:

- Discovery@VCU
- Health Careers Pipeline
- Bridging Richmond

Members of the Lobs & Lessons Advisory Council:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
Fred Brunner	Deputy Commissioner, Virginia Workers' Compensation Commission and Vice-President, Richmond Tennis Association
Elizabeth Fraizer	Co-Founder, Mary and Frances Youth Center and Co-owner, Richmond Raiders
Shima Grover	Tennis Enthusiast and Advisory Board Member, Richmond Tennis Association
Joe Grover	Past Vice President, USTA Board of Directors and President, Richmond Tennis Association
William James	Instructional Specialist, Richmond Public Schools
Carrie LeCrom	Assistant Director, VCU Center for Sport Leadership
Cris Robinson	Director of Tennis, Willow Oaks Country Club

RESEARCH

In determining the opportunities for realizing the Mary and Frances Youth Center's vision as *a critical hub for both direct training and programming to support underserved children in the Richmond region, as well as a national model for effective out-of-school-time programs*, several areas of interest were explored:

PROFILE OF "UNDERSERVED" CHILDREN

The 2010 U.S. Census reported 38,009 children (0-17 years) residing within the City of Richmond. One in four of these children lives in a household at or below the poverty line. More than half of the parents of these children are single parents. The official government poverty line is based on an estimate of the cost of meeting a household's basic needs. Though this is the most widely used indicator, poverty is best understood as a clustering of social and economic disadvantages of different kinds which severely constrain human functioning and well-being. According to the 2009 Census Bureau, Richmond's poverty rate is 22%; however, the actual poverty rate at the moment is estimated at 24% due to the recession. Nearly 36% of Richmond households fall below half the median household income line (under \$25k); 48% of Richmond households are below 70% (\$35,000) and 10.5% of all families in Richmond earn less than \$10,000 (20% of the median income, extreme economic poverty) compared to 3.6% of families in the metropolitan area as a whole and 4.9% of families nationally. These startling figures suggest that poverty is not an isolated problem limited to a few neighborhoods, but is something that touches nearly half the population of our city.

Information released by HOME (Housing Opportunities Made Equal) indicates that in the City of Richmond alone, there are more than 3,500 project based public housing households, averaging an income of only \$9,501. HOME's report, *The Intersection of Housing and Opportunity*, which measured the levels of *opportunity*—the good chance for progress—in various geographic areas, indicates that extreme poverty areas are very often correlated with lower opportunity because residents experience poorly funded schools, inadequate healthcare, violence, high unemployment and other economic and social distresses. Of Richmond's extreme poverty communities, 32% of the families are single mothers with children, 77% of the population is African American, and only 18% have an associate's degree or greater.

Data suggest that a notable segment of children and youth growing up in Richmond are not well prepared for the futures they will face. According to the Richmond Public Schools, 2011-12 Balanced Score Card, the percent of Richmond kindergarteners whose Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) scores met kindergarten readiness levels were 8% lower than the state; 18% of 1st graders and 26% of both 2nd and 3rd graders were identified as needing intervention. For 2010-11, the Virginia Department of Education (VDE) reports that across the board, Richmond students fall behind state percentages in proficiency in core subjects. Based on Performance Assessments,

elementary students scored 74% in math compared to 76% in the state and 80% in English compared to 88% in the state. These discrepancies become even more stark and dramatic during middle school years. Eighth grade SOL Assessments show that 78% passed the reading assessment compared to 90% in the state, and only 68% of Richmond students passed in math compared to 82% in the state. Lastly, only 88% of high school students passed both the reading and math SOL Assessments compared to 94% in the state. In addition, during 2011, Richmond was in a twelve-way tie for the [worst attendance](#) of the Virginia school divisions. According to the VDE, the dropout rate in Richmond City is double that of the state and only 69% of students graduate high school on-time, of which, 26% have no career or education plans after high school. For students in underserved communities, 8th grade achievement is the single greatest predictor of college and career readiness.

Adolescence, and middle school in particular, may provide an important and critical opportunity to reduce risks for negative developmental outcomes and to support preparation for successful transitions to adulthood.

RELEVANT ISSUES IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL, MENTORING AND TRAIN-THE-TRAINER PROGRAMS

A growing body of literature is informing our understanding of ways we can best support the adaptive development of adolescents and youth during their time beyond the school day. Out-of-school time (OST) includes early childhood educational activities, before and after school programs and summer programs for youth. Durlak and Weissberg found that youth programs which were sequenced, active, focused and explicit supported more positive outcomes for the adolescents involved. Research has also provided valuable insights into the best practices of mentoring, but this research is continuing to evolve and produce new understanding of what is effective. The literature has begun to clarify that program quality supports more positive outcomes for youth; however there are several challenges facing programs serving youth. Because of the low-wage structure in many organizations providing youth programming, there can be a very high rate of staff turnover. In addition, many staff may have very little training relevant to providing effective services to young people. Work to increase the skill level, knowledge base and professional development of youth service workers can support improved program quality as well as greater stability in the youth-serving workforce.

According to Richmond's Promise Neighborhood, local families are seeking quality OST and early education programs, as well as mentors for their children. Parental concerns include the need for transportation to and from activities, affordability of programs (even minor expenses made major dents in household budgets), programs that have been lost and the need for safe places for children to play. Families feel that on-going communication between service providers could lead to better participation in activities and fewer program cuts. Student success includes ensuring not only students' academic success, but also their physical and mental health and safety.

Recent work by United Way to support program quality has included the development of the Regional Partnership for Youth Development and led to a series of youth worker trainings which have been received enthusiastically. This work has grown from the United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg's prior work in facilitation of the Partnership for Out-of-School Time (POST) Coalition which began in 2004. The Coalition consisted of OST providers, Richmond City school officials, and community stakeholders who shared a common vision that "every school age youth in Greater Richmond has the opportunity to participate in quality out-of-school time programs that support educational success, foster personal development, create community connectedness and lead youth toward positive, productive adulthood." In 2008, Richmond (POST) was awarded funding to collect community-wide youth development data, conduct landscape mapping of OST resources, and to complete an "Actionable Agenda."

The Actionable Agenda set forth ambitious and bold strategies to increase collaboration and joint management of OST programs, engage regional and state policy makers in expanding programs as an economic development necessity, improving the quality of programming and the tracking of results citywide, and facilitating increased access to opportunities for young people and their parents. The Actionable Agenda outlined four goals: 1) create a coordinated system of quality OST programs that meet the needs of children while maximizing resources; 2) all OST providers will strive for and adhere to best practices that promote high quality programs; 3) ensure all youth and families have knowledge of and access to OST resources; and 4) to advance the necessary policy, programmatic, and financial supports to achieve the Actionable Agenda. Local momentum and support for out-of-school time has continued to build with Bridging Richmond. In addition, the work of the United Way and the Greater Richmond Youth Development Partnership has included a pilot of a research-based and nationally recognized youth program quality development process (David P. Weikert Center). There is the opportunity for the Mary and Frances Youth Center to play a role as a more permanent home for these training and professional development supports that target improved program quality.

RESULTS OF SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUPS

As part of the process of expanding the vision for the MFYC, ideas were collected for a variety of potential new initiatives. Each stakeholder group was asked to indicate how well they thought the ideas generated fit with their understanding of pressing community needs and *Quest*-related priorities¹. In addition, a scan of national best practices of universities with youth-serving programs was prepared and presented to the Strategic Planning Task Force. (Appendix C)

Lobs & Lessons

The strategic planning process was also informed by prior work on the Lobs & Lessons strategic plan for 2009-2011. Progress on this plan's implementation is highlighted in Appendix D. This flagship program provides an excellent foundation for the expansion of the vision for the MFYC, but the current planning process also provided perspectives on opportunities to strengthen and enhance current Lobs & Lessons programming. All input related to the current Lobs & Lessons program was reviewed by program leadership and integrated into an updated set of goals and action steps for 2012-2015 (Appendix E).

Across all stakeholder groups providing input into the strategic future of the MFYC, several significant findings emerged:

1. Key strengths on which to build include the unique window on higher education that the structural and physical location of the MFYC at VCU provides to program participants and their families, and the strong university-community collaborations.
2. Gaps related to community youth service and programming needs focus on:
 - a. Youth STEM training, resources and supports,
 - b. Supports for youth orientation to and aspirations for higher education,
 - c. Access to quality training for youth-serving professionals, and
 - d. The enhancement of parent engagement.
3. Multiple opportunities exist to expand upon the initial success of the USTA First Serve life skills curriculum already offered through the Lobs & Lessons program.

¹ Reports from the focus group sessions and individual interviews are available upon request.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS: THE FUTURE OF THE MARY AND FRANCES YOUTH CENTER

The MFYC is positioned to be a key intersection between the community and Virginia Commonwealth University. An expanded vision is recommended for the MFYC:

The Mary and Frances Youth Center will be a national leader in university-community collaboration for positive youth development.

All programs of the Center should lead toward this vision and align with the mission and creed:

Mission:

The Mary and Frances Youth Center provides programming and training to enhance the lives of youth in the Richmond metro area.

Creed:

The Mary and Frances Youth Center

- *empowers youth to broaden their expectations in life;*
- *inspires youth to identify and engage their talents; and*
- *supports youth in strengthening their life skills.*

Lobs & Lessons will continue to be the flagship program of the MFYC. In addition, two new initiatives are recommended as additional programs of the Mary and Frances Youth Center.

KEY THEMES/PROMISES

Goals and initiatives in support of the vision and mission of the Mary and Frances Youth Center are built upon three key themes, or promises:

- Theme 1: The Mary and Frances Youth Center delivers quality training and training programs for current and future providers of youth out-of-school time.
- Theme 2: The Mary and Frances Youth Center provides quality programming for youth.

- Theme 3: The Mary and Frances Youth Center investigates, discovers and disseminates knowledge on youth programming and serves as a national repository for best practices information.

THEME 1: MFYC DELIVERS QUALITY TRAINING AND TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE PROVIDERS OF YOUTH OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

GOALS

1. Examine and explore the feasibility of MFYC becoming a local and regional youth training resource for youth program quality and youth development professionals;
2. Establish an advisory group to examine curricular, programmatic and credentialing opportunities for VCU students whose future career paths will focus on supporting positive youth development.

INITIATIVE 1: YOUTH PROGRAM QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE (NEW)

Nationally, a growing body of research and evaluation work has underlined the importance of the **quality** of youth programming in supporting positive outcomes for program participants (e.g., Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Several states have undertaken initiatives to support positive youth outcomes through increasing youth program quality standards as evidence indicates that program quality is linked to youth program outcomes. Building on its experience with the Highscope-Perry Project, the David P. Weikert Center (<http://www.cypq.org/>) has developed the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA), a validated instrument designed to evaluate the quality of youth programs and identify staff training needs (http://www.cypq.org/products_and_services/assessment_tools). The YPQA involves an organizational self-assessment and external observations of program operations to support targeted improvements in the quality of service delivery. Youth agency staff and leaders receive support in completing program assessments and access capacity-building workshops provided by trained coaches.

Locally, building on its work with the Forum for Youth Investment and Readyby21 (<http://www.forumfyi.org/>), the Greater Richmond Youth Development Partnership, began planning in June 2011 that included a focus on improving services and opportunities for children and youth during their school years. The GRYDP leads priority work in the middle school years (grades 4 through 9) for *Bridging Richmond*². Recently, the GRYDP has been working on the development of standards of quality for out-of-school time providers and has conducted initial pilots of youth program assessments using the YPQA.

As the initiative to improve the quality of youth services in the Richmond region moves forward, additional professional development training will be needed to help agencies

² *Bridging Richmond* is “ a region-wide effort that is attempting to “bridge” educational efforts across all segments of the educational pipeline — early childhood, K-12, college/technical training, careers — and all segments of our region: the city of Richmond and the counties of Chesterfield, Hanover and Henrico.” (See: <http://www.bridgingrichmond.org/home.html>)

meet the standards of quality; however the development of such training is beyond the current capacity of the GRYDP. Leadership of the GRYDP is eager to collaborate with VCU's MFYC on the development of a training program. The "Youth Program Quality Assessment" process includes a number of recommended Youth Work Methods Workshops that could be a part of such a program. Thus, agencies that undergo the assessment process could have easy access to training as part of their improvement plan. The proposed initiative would involve MFYC taking the role of coordination of the ongoing assessment and training process.

This program would be offered by VCU's MFYC in collaboration with the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg and the GRYDP. The program would provide infrastructure that supports this capacity building work.

Beyond efforts focusing on program quality, there have also been other national efforts to support the professional development and preparation of individuals who work with youth and in youth-serving organizations. For example, the BEST Training Institute is a national professional development program that helps meet the youth work field's need for training in best practices in supporting positive, healthy outcomes for young people. This initiative also supports the recognition of youth work as a profession (<http://www.youthworkcentral.org/best-initiative/best-training-institute.html>). However, there is no local entity approved to offer the BEST training programs. There are opportunities for the MFYC to explore its further development to address these local training needs.

In addition to meeting a critical community need, there are several potential connections with VCU's academic programs. VCU academic units, including the School of Social Work, School of Education, and Department of Psychology could be involved in the program curriculum development, selection and implementation. In addition, current VCU students could also have the opportunity to participate in targeted career training. All youth serving programs on VCU's campus might send students and staff through the training program, better ensuring that VCU's own programs meet quality standards. There may also be an opportunity to develop a certificate program in youth development programming. In addition, considering the range of funded research projects that focus on evidence-based intervention and prevention services and programs for youth³, there may be the opportunity to expand curricular components to include training in evidence-based programs and curricula. In addition, the development of these relationships with researchers focusing on youth development and prevention may provide the future opportunity to position the MFYC as a catalyst for research and research training on positive youth development, including research on youth-development training and the development and evaluation of evidence-based interventions.

Given the excellent fit of a training program with the University and the alignment with *Quest* priorities, as well as the enthusiasm in the community for such a

³ This includes work by the VCU Center for Cultural Experiences in Prevention, VCU Clark-Hill Institute.

program, it is recommended that the MFYC explore the opportunity to become a local and regional youth training resource. Specifically, we recommend that a detailed proposal for such a youth development training program, including a business model, be developed.

IMMEDIATE ACTION STEPS

1. Tina Carter, Director of MFYC and Sandra Booth, Manager of Community Initiatives, United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg, are working to review current progress on the implementation of the regional training plan and designed a pilot program for the MFYC's implementation of the YPQA. This plan will support proposal development to continue the pilot and MFYC's development as a training center. The initial plan is anticipated in Fall 2012. (Appendix F)
2. Establish a MFYC Curriculum Advisory Workgroup involving key units across VCU⁴ and community partners to examine curricular intersections and interdisciplinary program and training opportunities (e.g., student field placement and internships) linked to MFYC's existing programs and the emerging training resource. This committee will also be charged with reviewing potential for the BEST training program and the development of a youth development certificate program.

⁴ Participating units at VCU might include: Psychology, Criminal Justice, Social Work, Health and Human Performance in Education, Sports Leadership, Arts Education, Health Pipeline programs in the Center for Health Disparities, Bridging Richmond and the Virginia Mentoring Partnership.

THEME 2: MFYC PROVIDES QUALITY PROGRAMMING FOR YOUTH

GOALS:

1. Establish MFYC as the programmatic home and structural point of access for Discovery@VCU and other youth development programs at VCU;
 2. Revise MFYC youth programmatic focus primarily on underserved youth and their connection to comprehensive or enhanced STEM programming (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math – enhanced by VCU's strengths in Health Sciences and Arts) pipelines; and
 3. Enhance the current Lobs & Lessons program to include stronger parental engagement.
-

INITIATIVE 2: DISCOVERY@VCU (NEW TO MFYC)

For over 20 years, VCU departments and units have provided a broad range of youth summer and afterschool programming, the most comprehensive of which is Discovery@VCU. While the previous summer "Discovery@VCU" has served the University well, the financial performance of the program and lack of strong alignment with *Quest* suggest that a revised version of this program would be beneficial. Based on both community needs, and *Quest* priorities, the Strategic Planning Task Force **recommends that the MFYC become the programmatic home and structural point of access for Discovery and that a revised program focus primarily on underserved youth.** The MFYC plans to proceed with implementation of the final year of the S.E.E.D. grant and for summer 2012 will not offer the Discovery@VCU program. During the summer of 2012, in collaboration with VCU academic departments, MFYC and Division of Community Engagement staff will research and design a robust program for youth, and supporting assessments that will support future efforts to seek grant funding for these efforts.

Based on needs identified from the strategic planning process, future Discovery@VCU programs would be offered in areas that specifically leverage VCU strengths and respond to areas of emphasis for Richmond Public Schools and community partners. This would involve a specific focus on "Comprehensive/Enhanced STEM" areas (i.e., Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math, including the Health Sciences and Arts). While some programs might aim to expose underserved youth and their parents to higher education and to aid them in developing a stronger orientation toward future college attendance, other programs might aim to increase students' skills in particular academic areas or to increase their preparation for a particular career path. The MFYC can offer its own programs, but, perhaps more importantly, can also serve as a resource and coordinator for on-campus programming offered to youth by other VCU departments.

IMMEDIATE ACTION STEPS

1. Vice Provost for Community Engagement Catherine Howard engaged with Ken Kahn, Director of the VCU daVinci Center⁵, who led an interdisciplinary team of students during summer 2012 to conduct a business feasibility study for Discovery@VCU including an analysis of existing summer programs and the unique niche for summer programming to connect to the enhanced STEM pipeline⁶. (Final report was presented in August 2012). (Appendix G)

INITIATIVE 3: LOBS & LESSONS

Lobs & Lessons will continue as the flagship program of the MFYC. The program's success and growing national reputation was highlighted in January 2012 when it was recognized by the United State Tennis Association as one of the association's three National Junior Tennis & Learning chapters of the year.

A refocused mission statement provides clarity of purpose:

Lobs & Lessons is a youth enrichment program that strengthens life skills, promotes academics and creates a path to higher education through the sport of tennis.

Core values are included as guiding principles to the plan: getting along with others, regulating emotions, being coachable, practicing healthy habits, and learning the sport of tennis.

Based on the SWOT analysis, ongoing program evaluation, and other stakeholder input, **the following priorities are recommended for 2012-2015:**

- 1) Strengthen existing enrichment programs;**
- 2) Create parent engagement opportunities and enhance volunteerism;**
- 3) Expand university and community partnerships;**

⁵ "A collaboration of VCU's School of the Arts, Business and Engineering, the da Vinci Center for Innovation is a unique collegiate model that advances interdisciplinary innovation and technology-based entrepreneurship." (see <http://www.davincicenter.vcu.edu>)

⁶ This effort may complement VCU's contributions to the work of Bridging Richmond and have explicit linkages to the training opportunities discussed in the 1st recommendation.

- 4) **Expand the role of Lobs & Lessons in community through trainings, certifications, and events; and**
- 5) **Align operations and organizational structure to maximize productivity.**

Objectives for each goal and proposed action steps are detailed in Appendix E. This plan was reviewed by the Lobs & Lessons Advisory Council at its June 22, 2012 meeting.

ALIGNMENT WITH VCU'S QUEST FOR DISTINCTION

Both proposed new initiatives align well with Themes in VCU's *Quest for Distinction*. The youth program assessment and training program strengthens relationships with a large number of community partners and focuses on the key targeted area of K-12 support services (*Quest* Theme IV; Goal IV.B). The close collaboration with the Greater Richmond Youth Development Partnership ensures that there is strong alignment with Bridging Richmond and the middle school focus. Through the assessment and training program, VCU students will have the opportunity to obtain training for service-learning experiences, expand their scholarship related to serving youth (*Quest* Theme IV; Goal IV.A.) and gain real-world experiences that can prepare them for work in the youth-serving sector.

Clearly, Discovery@VCU will also provide expanded opportunities for VCU students to engage in service-learning through multiple offerings for youth in the STEM areas and thus support *Quest* Theme IV; Goal IVA. A re-formulated Discovery@VCU also provides opportunities for community partnerships that focus on K-12 Education (*Quest* Theme IV; Goal IV.B). In addition, this proposed initiative supports the Health Careers Pipeline and ongoing efforts to attract diverse students to health-related and STEM careers (*Quest* Theme III; Goal III.A.).

**THEME 3: MFYC INVESTIGATES, DISCOVERS AND DISSEMINATES
KNOWLEDGE ON YOUTH PROGRAMMING AND SERVES AS A NATIONAL
REPOSITORY FOR BEST PRACTICES INFORMATION**

GOALS

1. Establish an advisory group to examine the opportunity for the MFYC to become the home and structural point for supporting access to research on positive youth development and for supporting collaboration on and dissemination of VCU research on positive youth development.

In addition to the number of youth programs operating at VCU there are a notable number of research and academic units that support our understanding of positive youth development. For example, VCU is home to the Clark-Hill Institute for Positive Youth Development, one of the Centers for Disease Control Academic Centers of Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention. In addition, VCU departments including Pediatrics, Exercise Science, Family Medicine and Psychology have implemented a program called T.E.E.N.S. Program (Teaching, Encouragement, Exercise, Nutrition and Support) to support healthy weight among adolescents. Academic programs in Social Work, Education, Pediatrics, Nursing, Psychology and Sports Leadership all involve programs, research and curricular offerings that inform our understanding of youth development and effective program supports for young people. The Mary and Frances Youth Center has the opportunity to support its programming through the engagement of these units and by serving as a hub and point of coordination for strategic learning about positive youth development. To this end, **we recommend the formation of a research advisory group to engage in detailed planning to support the coordination of research and discovery activities focusing on positive supports for adolescents.**