

TAG in Action: Palm Beach County *Birth to 22* Initiative



As part of its national call to action, **Adolescent Health, Think, Act, Grow**[®] (TAG), the Office of Adolescent Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has identified a number of successful strategies for improving adolescent health throughout the country. One organization in Palm Beach County, Florida serves young people through community collaboration and youth engagement.

The Goal

Birth to 22: United for Brighter Futures (Birth to 22) supports the healthy growth, development, and education of children and youth prenatal through young adulthood, so that they can graduate from high school and succeed in life.

The Game Plan

Birth to 22: United for Brighter Futures is a coalition of more than 60 community partners in Palm Beach County, Florida committed to supporting children and youth to help them become successful adults. *Birth to 22* was established following a 2013 Youth Symposium that brought together elected and community leaders. During the event, youth-serving organizations realized that they needed a common agenda with actionable goals to support children and youth. As a result, the participants created the *Birth to 22* initiative.

Birth to 22 leadership knew that they needed to leverage the existing coalitions and authentically engage the county's diverse communities. Leadership decided to utilize the Forum for Youth Investment's collective impact approach and began their planning by holding several community conversations. A unique feature of this process is that youth were trained and co-facilitated the conversations. More than 700 community members and youth participated in the conversations and six common themes emerged: economics and access; parenting and home environment; social/emotional challenges; educational supports; health and wellness; and community stressors. The work culminated in the *Birth to 22* Youth Master Plan entitled "[Strengthening the Steps to Success](#)," which identifies common outcomes, data collection, and action steps for the community.

The Winning Plays

Birth to 22 engaged youth throughout the planning process and continues to do so. Tammy Fields, the Palm Beach County Youth Services Department Director, shared that, "It was very effective to have youth facilitate the community conversations. We didn't want to lose that momentum. We started a Youth Advisory Council but the youth didn't like that name. They suggested *Future Leaders United for Change*, which is much better! The group is comprised of youth that receive our services. They are helping guide our work. For example, the youth explained that they felt guilty getting food for themselves at school when their whole family needed to be fed, so they often refused. As a result, our hunger initiative is providing youth with extra food, such as rice or pasta, which can be stretched to feed the whole family. Over and over, they are showing us how relatively small oversights on our part can dramatically impact youth's ability or willingness to benefit from our services."

Learn More

Birth to 22 Initiative
<http://pbcbirthto22.com/>

