**Youth Exchange Portfolio Review of My City Real World Outcome Document**

The Youth Exchange portfolio review was held on March 10, 2015 at OSF-New York. Participants were (from Justice Initiative) Rebekah Delsol, Rachel Neild, and Marc Krupanski; (from OSIFE) Clara Grosset and Debora Guidetti; (from the Youth Exchange) Maryanne Olson; (from the Strategy Unit) Johanna Chao Kreilick, Dan Sershen, and Alexandra Sveikauskas; and Chris Stone. Tracey Gurd from the Strategy Unit and an external guest, Arjan Kasius, Chief of Operations for the Gouda Police Department, served as discussants.

Maryanne Olson introduced the session with an overview of the portfolio review document distributed earlier. Rebekah Delsol added commentary and context from her personal experience developing the project from 2010.

Arjan Kasius then discussed the implementation of My City Real World in one of the original OSF-supported projects in Gouda, the Netherlands. He provided some background on the issue of ethnic profiling in Gouda, specifically noting the poor relations between authority figures in Gouda (including police) and Moroccan young people and the increasing alienation of Moroccan youth in the community. By 2011, 80% of arrests by Arjan’s police force were Moroccan. This created a lot of prejudice because every encounter they had with these youth was negative. Arjan was searching for a project where his police officers could have positive interactions w/young people. For Arjan, the project established a safe, respectful space for youth and police to meet and dialogue on the issues from both sides. While only 15-20 police officers were involved in project but when they went back to the police station they fostered new discussions with other officers. Arjan hopes to see the project expand, and had hoped this year to offer a revised program for 2,000 police officers.

The portfolio review participants asked Arjan questions mostly concerning the program’s challenges and any changes that came about as a result of the project. Arjan noted that three boys from the first year of the project have served as spokesman for their community and keep in contact with the police department to help address issues related to crime and policing. Arjan also noted that keeping the project small and intimate, allowing for more focus on personal conversation, might not have as large of an immediate impact on changing policy, but works best for improving community relationships. In response to a question from Chris on the effectiveness of the project in identifying specific youth leaders, Arjan noted that this has not occurred because the focus has been more on working specifically within communities. Arjan completed his comments by suggesting that a critical component of this and future projects is identifying and developing strong facilitators to support the work and identifying strong community partners who can serve as a bridge between the police and facilitators and young people.

Arjan Kasius left the portfolio review at this point and the conversation opened up to a larger conversation on the development of the MCRW strategy and its evolution from a Youth Initiative/Justice Initiative project to a collaboration between the Justice Initiative and OSIFE, with technical and co-funding support from the Youth Exchange.

Tracey led this discussion with two related framing questions on leadership of the project and its evoluation, and the evolving roles between the Justice Initiative, YI/YE, and OSIFE. From the Justice Initiative side, Rachel noted that there was fundamental, consistent, and intellectual leadership of the project by Rebekah. Rebekah noted that the original project implementation was driven very much by the Youth Initiative’s formal leadership and that overall it’s been more positive to evolve the relationship to become more collaborative and horizontal. She noted that this more fluid model has allowed for more nimble response to on-the-ground changes. But critical to this sort of relationship is a need for consistency in personnel on the OSF side.

Maryanne noted that she had had very little interaction with the MCRW work prior to 2013, but that the Youth Exchange transition team saw this project as a model for thinking about youth engagement because of its “stepped” structure – moving from young people’s initial contacts with police to their participation as emerging young leaders in models like StopWatch. She also noted that the evolving model of collaboration with Justice Initiative, and increasingly in late 2014 with OSIFE, was helpful and informative in helping shape the Youth Exchange’s new strategic approach to supporting youth work in the network as a support unit rather than as a programmatic lead on project

Chris asked for more discussion on the role of the Youth Exchange, specifically if the Youth Exchange had been a partner from the beginning, what opportunities for youth leadership did we miss? Chris raised questions on the role of individual young leaders, noting that these seemed to be lacking from the project in Gouda. Rebekah and Maryanne noted a few specific leaders, particularly in the UK. This turned to a conversation on enabling youth leadership. Maryanne suggested that for successful collaboration between young people and civil society, there need to be strong organizational bases that are either youth-led or youth-driven. While robust youth-led organizations that we’ve encountered in this project (like Fully Focused) can be critical partners, supporting youth-led organizations can be challenging as they very often have structural challenges that make it hard to invest multi-year support. Many youth-led organizations also lack strong ties to power centers that can influence/reshape policy and sometimes become siloed from other civil society organizations. An alternative is to find stronger organizations that are interested in meaningfully partnering with youth, either through bringing young people on as staff members or in re-thinking their engagement with youth as a constituency. Rebekah noted where in Europe this has been, and continues to be, a challenge. Debora also noted that this challenge could equally be applied to her experiences working with minority-led organizations in Europe. A lesson learned from the last few years on this portfolio is to identify at least a few strong potential partners (both from the youth-led and the youth-driven side) before implementing a new youth-driven strategy.

There was some discussion at this stage on the health of civil society organizations in this field brought on by the closure of Runnymede Trust, which had instigated the initial decision to do a review of this portfolio. Both Justice Initiative and OSIFE staff noted the general challenge in Europe of finding sustainable support for sensitive topics like discrimination and policing. They also flagged that this would be looked at in more detail in their upcoming portfolio review on April 1.

The review concluded with a more focused approach on the Youth Exchange itself and its evolving role within the network. Chris noted that he had a hard time getting a sense of the Youth Exchange’s work within the portfolio review document itself, but felt that the conversation itself had begun to reveal a few promising areas for the Youth Exchange to consider moving forward. He noted that the Youth Exchange will likely face challenges in identifying where they are fostering leadership and where they are supporting a program’s strategy around a specific field or concept, and that initially this might not be the same goal.

He also noted that the conversation around leadership and developing a shared strategy is intriguing, although we have not come up with a “conclusion” yet on what works best. He noted that he will be interested to see how the Youth Exchange’s approach to co-funding in particular develops, and how this will lead to real, sustained collaboration and ultimately lead to stronger youth-driven work as well and not just be one-off receipt of additional funds to a specific project.

The portfolio review helped the Youth Exchange and the Justice Initiative in particular in assessing the evolving role, and identifying critical areas for both continued collaboration and conversation on how best to sustain the youth-driven elements of the Ethnic Profiling Team’s strategy (which has defined support for youth as part of their fealty to the field work) moving forward. Both programs agree that the evolving role from 2013-2015 has been positive, particularly in the more cohesive and consistent approach to collaboration through idea and knowledge share which has continued with the growing involvement of OSIFE in this work as well. The Youth Exchange’s peer-learning component has also allowed opportunities to share work with other partners at OSF, particularly with US Programs staff, and has also allowed opportunities for youth partners to connect with regional and global youth who are doing similar work either around ethnic profiling, policing, or both.

One takeaway for the Youth Exchange from this conversation is that there is a need to better define and assess what we call a “young leader.” There is a tendency at OSF to have a somewhat narrow focus on what a young leader is which prioritizes a certain sort of “elite” leader with a specific set of skills. Both the Justice Initiative staff and Youth Exchange staff discussed the challenge of this limited view post-portfolio review, as the way OSF and other leading institutions often define youth leadership, does not always accurately reflect how young people lead within their own communities or with their peers. Our current definition also does not consider evolving conversations around horizontal leadership within the youth sector itself, particularly around new movements we are seeing globally, for example around policing in the US and youth’s role in protest. As part of its evolving role, the Youth Exchange sees this question of “youth leadership” as a critical area for reflection and assessment over the next few years.

Tying in with this, is our understanding that we need to critically assess the best entry points for youth within OSF’s global work. We need to continue to develop our co-funding framework to reflect this assessment – identifying where specifically it is better to support the growth of civil society through direct funding of youth-led organizations, and where it is better to link a growing network of young individual leaders to existing or already-established civil society organizations.