

Community Collaborator

Overview |

The Brown School and Better Family Life, Inc (BFL) have a long-term partnership focusing on collaborative efforts that will lead to improved community conditions in the School's four priority geographic areas: North City, North County, South City, and East St. Louis. Three focus groups were conducted with BFL leadership and staff to obtain their input on the future priorities for the School. The major themes that emerged from the focus groups are presented below.

1

Key issues in St. Louis to address over next 5 years

- Address intergenerational poverty and wealth disparities. There is a great need for policy solutions to address poverty.
- Address and preventing violence and crime particularly among youth. Need to address the root causes. Brown School could link youth to educational and job training opportunities. We should also support entrepreneurship since small businesses can propel a community. There is also a great need to address mental health issues in the community.
- Increase access to high quality post-secondary education for youth in North St. Louis. Consider revitalizing the idea of an education zone — WUSTL has the facilities and programming to start engaging youth and establishing a crib-to-college pipeline.
- Cultivate partnerships and collaborations among and with under-resourced organizations.
- Address the Delmar Divide. A good step forward was WUSTL's subsidy of employee home purchases in North St. Louis. WUSTL should consider building a portion of the campus north of Delmar. Its presence is important. There should be investment in the neighborhoods including beautification
- Address cultural identity and racial equity.
- Strengthen families and helping them access resources.
- Address food desserts and expanding urban agriculture.
- Bring healthcare practitioners to the neighborhoods.

2

One thing Brown School should change

- Brown School and BFL should identify a core project that can be built upon over the course of its 15-year partnership. Possible topics could include violence prevention (especially among youth) and housing development. Brown School should help to sustain initiative to reduce tokenism of BFL name and community credibility.
- Provide more financial support for BFL programs and identify other types of investments that the Brown School/WUSTL can make.
- Build BFL into the curriculum. Each vice president could come to the classroom and share with students.

2

One thing Brown School should change *(continued)*

- Greater recognition of grassroots organizers and service providers despite the lack of advanced degrees. Reduce the emphasis on prestige of the degree and tap into the wellspring of knowledge and experience from people in the field with demonstrated success.
- Provide more opportunities for BFL youth and clients to engage in a campus experience and be connected with WUSTL. Expose them to the possibilities as they relate to an education at WUSTL.
- Restructuring practicum to create more long-term engagement of students. This will help to create continuity and consistency. Also revamp training of practicum supervisors to be more sensitive to the supervisors.
- Spend more time on proactive supports and testing new approaches especially on violence prevention. Evidence-based practice becomes obsolete quickly. We need to move beyond analyzing and sharing results of problems.
- Increase visibility of the BFL-Brown School partnership through shared programming and facilities. Provide reciprocal use of facilities. Brown School could host more programming at BFL. BFL can host programs at the School.
- Build a stronger commitment to race and equity among Brown School faculty, staff, and students. While co-location of the Brown School at BFL is helpful, it may be better to have a staff person physically located at BFL to facilitate the connection between BFL activities and Brown School resources.
- Greater role in the coordination and connecting of all of the WUSTL initiatives and resources by the Brown School. There is a need to better communicate strategies and connect community partners that are grouped within a strategy. Brown School needs more capacity for this.
- Greater transparency by WUSTL regarding funding decisions to WUSTL-connected institutions (e.g., InvestSTL funding decisions). Care should be taken not to cultivate rivalries between community organizations especially among north side organizations.