



PropelNext Grantee Story – Accelerating Learning and Results At Hope Builders, More Youth Benefit from Better Programs

“PropelNext helped us surface the best parts of our organization and increase them in a purposeful way,” said Shawna Smith, executive director of Taller San Jose Hope Builders.

Hope Builders gives disadvantaged young people the job training and life skills they need to move out of poverty. For years Hope Builders focused on job-specific skills, offering intensive boot camps to teach the technical skills necessary to work in health care, construction and business. While the agency provided case management services and life skills programs, they were a lower priority. Then Hope Builders won a PropelNext grant and everything changed.

Smith, who has been at Hope Builders for 18 years, described PropelNext as a catalytic

experience. “It helped us to clarify the outcomes we want to achieve and identify the drivers that can get us there.”

Through PropelNext, Hope Builders staff got the tools and training to collect and analyze data about their impact. What they learned surprised them. It turned out that providing stability and life skills was just as critical to students’ long-term success as technical, job-related skills. When confronted with the data, the Hope Builders team knew they had to respond. The agency brought its case management and life skills programs up to the same level of rigor, intention, and consistency as the technical training programs. They added two years of structured follow-up for every young person in the program.

Making this change was no easy task. The transition created significant financial challenges and caused Smith to wonder what she had unleashed. Hope Builders had to double the size of its case management staff. Some employees chose to leave rather than cope with the change. But it transformed the organization. Smith says, “Now our staff are at a different level. How we orient people changed. How we hire changed.”

Some challenges remain. The organization’s Board of Directors has supported the PropelNext work and stepped up with financial contributions to smooth the path, but they are learning to operate differently also. It is an ongoing process.

Hope Builders’ efforts have led to new opportunities for growth. In the fall of 2015, Hope Builders opened its first new program in twenty years, expanding into the adjacent city of Anaheim. Using the data they collected through the program and supported by PropelNext coaches, they were able to launch the new site without cannibalizing existing programs or risking program quality and consistency. After serving 300 people annually for several years, Hope Builders increased by fifty percent last year and hopes to double the number of youth served in the coming year.

Smith says they couldn’t have done it without PropelNext. “It has invigorated me as a leader. This organization is thriving and I am too,” she said.

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Shawna Smith, Executive Director

Highlights

- Expanded geographically, opening first new program in 20 years.
 - Increased number of youth served by 50%.
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Learn more about Hope Builders at <http://tsjhopebuilders.org>

Learn more about PropelNext at <http://www.propelnext.org> or contact Danielle Scaturro, Director, at dscaturro@emcf.org