

CASE STUDY #1

HOUSATONIC YOUTH SERVICES BUREAU

Summary

A Non-Profit Transformed:

Building a New Home and a New Mission for HYSB

The Housatonic Youth Services Bureau (HYSB) needed to find a new home . . . quickly. It also needed to expand its existing programs, add new ones and raise the funds to do it. HYSB then decided it was time to revitalize and refocus its board and develop a new strategic plan.

Working with Danosky & Associates the Northwestern Connecticut non-profit was “transformed as it brought funding capacity together to solve a community problem”. HYSB now has “an enormous capability to provide services we never thought we could accomplish before.” It also has a new home, a new level of community awareness, superior Board engagement and a workable Strategic Plan for the next four years.

“We have done wildly better than we expected” - HYSB.

The Situation

Established in 1991 the Housatonic Youth Services Bureau serves the complex needs of children and young adults in the Northwest Corner of Connecticut where social services for families are scarce. HYSB faces a perennial challenge from the large rural area it serves. Many affluent families are drawn to its picturesque beauty. But this beauty can also mask serious issues which negatively impact children and young adults including substance abuse, teen violence and academic problems. HYSB services include family clinical therapy, advocacy, prevention programming, referral services, community- outreach and youth events.

HYSB faced two immediate challenges. It needed a new home and it needed a mission and vision for growth. It was also clear that more ongoing Board support was needed for HYSB to realize its full potential.

HYSB had been based in an older building that was scheduled for demolition. It was offered attractive loft space in another older building, but that meant it needed to quickly raise at least \$150,000 for renovations.

Also, more space meant more opportunities to grow -- but what kind of growth would best serve families and children in the region? Clearly HYSB needed a strategic plan. Also, HYSB wanted to know how to build involvement and support from its Board.

“Our board is mostly teachers, ministers, clergy, and social services professionals,” said HYSB Board Chairman Linda Sloan. “Fund raising really wasn’t in our makeup, but the loss of our building forced us to take action,” she said. After interviewing four consultants HYSB picked Danosky & Associates (D&A).

“As soon as we met Sharon we said, ‘She’s the one.’ She was a perfect match. She laid out an unbelievably clear path for us that was realistic about what we could achieve. She also made us believe in ourselves,” Ms. Sloan said.

The Process

With a tight timeline – it was summer and the old HYSB headquarters was being torn down by spring --the first step was putting a strategic planning process in place. A mission-margin matrix was used by D&A to determine HYSB’s current situation and target opportunities to grow. The planning process revealed five key strategies including raising funds through a capital campaign. It also identified the main elements of HYSB’s mission: to be a lifeline for children and family, to help children achieve self-actualization and to make the community safer and healthier. In follow-up meetings specific tactics, desired outcomes, role assignments, timelines and dashboards to monitor progress were developed.

A campaign feasibility study by D&A quickly revealed immediate opportunities. These included a state grant and contributions from willing HYSB supporters in the community. The study revealed fund raising potential of \$500,000 or more, well above the original \$150,000 required. A volunteer “campaign cabinet” of influential community members was formed to provide

leadership for the campaign. With leadership in place, coaching, training and support was provided and the gift solicitation process began.

“We were a very quiet organization that did good work. But we had to get noisy in a hurry,” said Nancy Bird, Chairman of HYSB’s Campaign Cabinet.

“Sharon provided the training and the motivation to do that. She knew we had to tell our story and educate potential donors. She also knew we had to build capacity and that we had the potential to do it. We did events we wouldn’t have dreamed of doing before she taught us what to do. For a small organization like ours, to have someone like Sharon with us was invaluable. She made us proud of ourselves,” Ms. Bird said.

“It was a major cultural shift,” Ms. Bird said. “But we needed to do it to put in place a culture of philanthropy and fund raising. We needed to know we could just go out and do it!” Ms. Bird said.

Later on as the campaign achieved success and HYSB’s new home was ready for occupancy; the Board regrouped and revisited their strategic plan. After a one-day intensive review session, conducted by D&A, the Board re-affirmed its strategies and emerged reinvigorated and re-committed.

Conclusion

Board Engagement Increased

Leadership Improved

\$1 Million Raised – 700% above Goal

New Home Built

As word spread of the good work of HYSB so did community involvement. Cocktail receptions held by existing supporters drew even more support. Buoyed by success, leadership also improved. The Campaign chairman, already comfortable in the role, became more confident and stronger. The Board, rallying around its new cause, became more engaged and stronger. Ultimately the campaign was able to raise nearly \$1 million, surpassing its \$150,000 fund-raising goal by nearly 700% and providing a strong financial foundation for growth. The campaign activity also raised the visibility of HYSB in the region and increased the number of supporters for future fund raising activities. Importantly, the HYSB Board became extremely engaged – far more than previously – and put a long-range plan in place for future growth. HYSB now had a clear path for that growth was established reflecting HYSB’s new financial strength and confidence in the impact HYSB can have.

“Building our comfort level was a crucial element in our success,” said HYSB Executive Director, Nick Pohl. “We knew we were going into uncharted territory and we would just turn to Sharon, and say, ‘what do we do know?’ Having someone like Sharon with us every step of the way, someone who really knows their stuff, was a critical component in our success. She was always available to us. As a result we are light years ahead of where we were when we started. Sharon made us into one big effective team.”