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Inside:
Wichita's "Big Society"
Youth Service on Boards
2010 Legislative Wrap-up



Youth Service On Boards

by Gina McDonald

The City of Salina explores new opportunities for youth in the community.

The City of Salina will be exploring new opportunities to collaborate with young people in the community. After reviewing literature from the program, “Youth on Board,” the City of Salina has decided to include slots on their advisory boards and commissions for youth ages 14-22. This concept came from the City Manager, Jason Gage, who requested that staff review the current youth program. He suggested that staff submit recommendations for improvements to the current model.

Youth mentorships that have provided opportunities for teenagers to work with adults have been evolving over the past several years. A recent literature search provided information suggesting an exciting new concept that can serve the City of Salina with an opportunity to utilize youth to provide input and involvement on its boards and commissions.

The benefit of working with youth empowerment trainings has been documented. The National Council of Disability (NCD), and more recently, the Kansas Youth Empowerment Academy (KYEA) work with youth and adults to develop youth training and youth boards. Both NCD and KYEA programs evolved with the notion of giving young people empowerment tools and knowledge about participating on and overseeing not-for-profit boards of directors. Both programs identified, through educational and other institutions input, youth with disabilities who had leadership potential to participate in the programs.

It was determined that many cities had “youth councils,” who dealt with issues particular to youth issues. A number of cities have a one-day “shadowing” program where the youth will spend a day with a city official observing and discussing the job duties and actions of that position.

Other cities, like Salina, have one designated seat for youth on certain boards. Salina has one youth on the Recreation Board and one youth on the Arts and Humanities Board. Selection of youth to serve on these boards comes from graduates of the Junior Salina Leadership program.

Junior Leadership Salina, a program through the Salina Chamber of Commerce is an excellent training opportunity for young people in the community. However, in reviewing the demographics students selected for board appointments, the trend revealed an over representation of the higher socioeconomic class in the city.



In order to increase the base from which participants are chosen, Salina is increasing the referral sources used to identify potential youth who may have the potential for leadership. Salina asked for recommendations for participants from church leaders; X-Cel, an after school program; NAACP Teen Summit participants; middle and high school teachers; Disability Programs of North Central Kansas (DPOK); Catholic Charities of Salina; and the Salina Chamber.

The program “Youth on Boards,” which is a project of YouthBuild USA, confirmed what had been learned from other sources and experiences in other programs. It is vital to give young people meaningful work to perform. It is critical to prepare the advisory boards for knowing why they can benefit from youth participation.

Decisions and recommendations made on commissions and advisory boards tend to be more consequential than those made on a Youth Council. Recommendations have an impact on a variety of issues within the City. Active participation on a commission or advisory board can prepare youth for participation in activities of city government as well as participation on not-for-profit boards of directors.

“Youth on Boards” also suggested the importance of having at least two youth sit on an advisory board or commission together to enhance peer support. The City of Salina agrees that this model would allow the youth to discuss and draw from each other perspectives for support. The goals will be to identify at least two youth per board or commission within the City of Salina.

The youth will give their perspective on issues. But it will be clear that they are not expected to speak for all youth, any more



than any other member would be expected to represent an entire group.

Identification of mentors within the various advisory boards and commissions will assist the youth to insure successful integration into the board and/or commission. The mentor will assist in reducing anxiety with issues surrounding unfamiliarity with agenda topics, protocol, and other concerns at the meeting. This can prove to be a valuable tool to use with any new board or commission member, but in particular, it's important for young people who may not have had exposure to the workings of a board or commission.

There are a few cities that have programs similar to the type of programs the City of Salina is launching. City governments that are as diverse as Fall River, Massachusetts and Boise, Idaho have incorporated youth on boards. They have at least two youth participating on boards and offer formalized training for both youth and advisory board members prior to the youth participating on those boards.

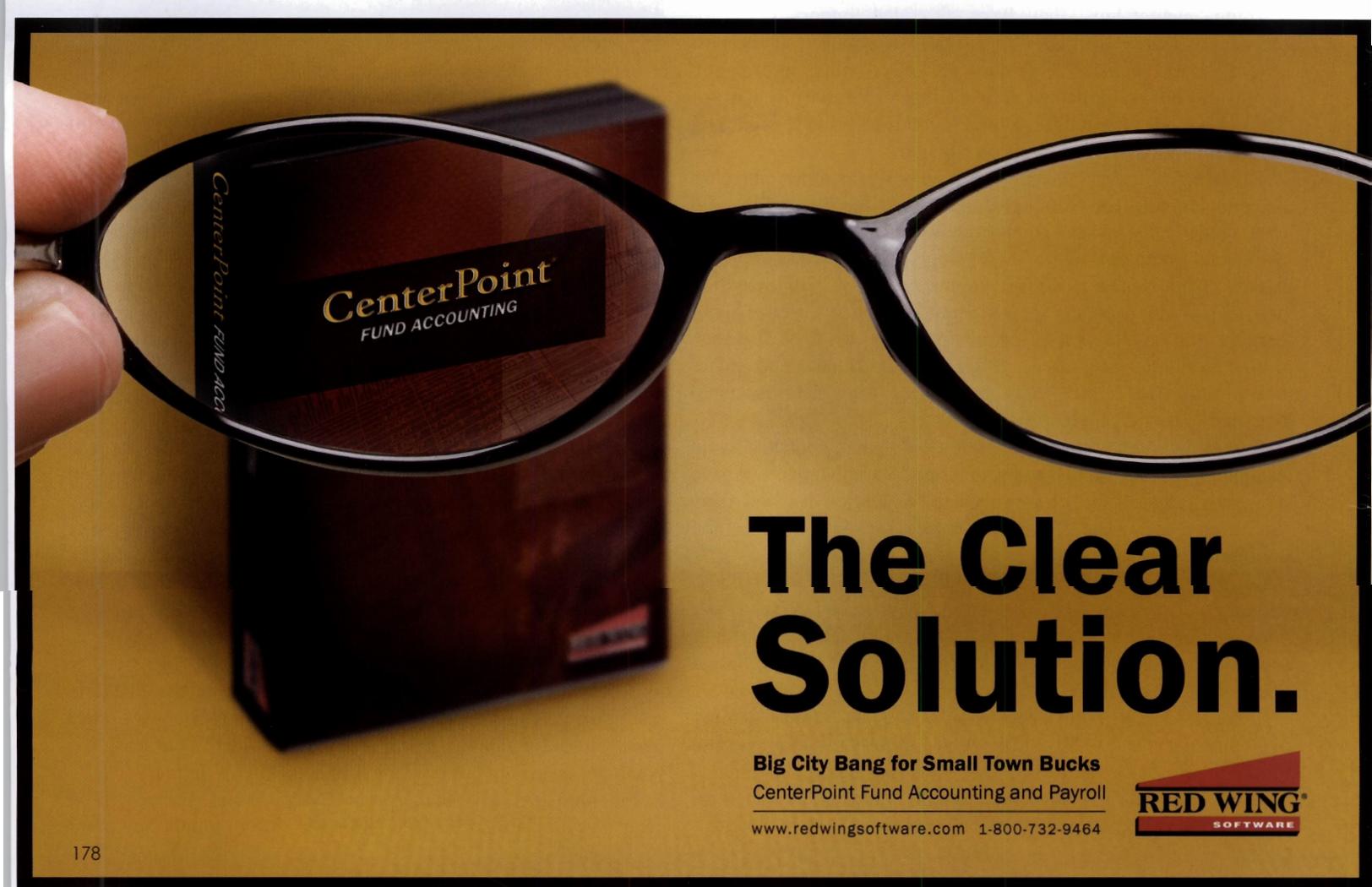
Youth members will participate in every aspect of the advisory board or commission and they will have the opportunity to vote on issues along with the rest of the board members. However, for

youth who are under the age of 18, their vote will not be formally included in the count for purposes of minutes. If there are any other "legal" aspects of board participation, those youth who are under the age of 18 may participate, but cannot legally have their vote counted on those matters.

The City of Salina is excited to begin this program and we have identified our first interested youth. The Human Relations Commission is the first to agree to participate in training. Commission members have identified mentors willing to support young people appointed to the Commission.

The goal is to learn lessons from the experience of the Human Relations Commission in this endeavor and promote the Youth on Board concept to the rest of the commissions and advisory boards for the City of Salina. This will be a great opportunity to promote our interest in getting input from all community members and learn from each other, which can only make the City of Salina a better place to live.

 *Gina McDonald is the Director of Salina's Human Relations Department. She can be reached at gina.mcdonald@salina.org or (785) 309-5745.*



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