Leveraging Human Capital to Promote Youth Empowerment: The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts-Crossroads for Kids Partnership

June 2012

A HEALTH PLAN’S CULTURE OF CIVIC CONCIENTIOUSNESS
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA) has been investing time and resources to support a culture of civic responsibility throughout its 75 years. All employees are encouraged to volunteer, and community involvement is a portion of each associate’s annual evaluation. BCBSMA works to provide ample opportunities for employees to become involved in the community, contributing financial capital and leveraging employee resources around key health and educational initiatives. One objective is to increase the number of caring adults in young people’s lives, and from that objective sprung a unique and productive partnership with a local non-profit, Crossroads for Kids.

Crossroads for Kids is a non-profit organization near Boston that provides mentorships and enrichment programs to at-risk youth ages 7 through 18. The Crossroads program includes an intensive summer camp and year-round mentoring to empower young people to achieve success in secondary school and beyond. The Crossroads program requires a long-term commitment from participants, with youth actively involved through high school graduation. BCBSMA began its working partnership with Crossroads for Kids through BCBSMA’s BlueCrew program.

HISTORY OF CITIZENSHIP – BLUECREW
BlueCrew, BCBSMA’s volunteer corps, enables each employee to take time off to volunteer during regularly scheduled work hours. BlueCrew activities include one-day service projects, weekly mentoring opportunities, skills-based volunteer work, and a full-time community service sabbatical program. Employees can choose which volunteer opportunities best fit their professional and personal goals, and BCBSMA’s Corporate Citizenship Team works to ensure that a wide variety of volunteer projects are included to reflect the full array of talents and interests among its employees. In 2011, more than 86 percent of employees participated in the program, engaging in 160 volunteer projects.

The BlueCrew has been so successful over the years that BCBSMA created the BlueCrew Leadership Council in 2010 to further develop employees’ commitment to community service and showcase their leadership skills. The Council generated immediate interest among employees, attracting more than 85 applicants for 35 spots. The Council meets regularly, and members are challenged to come up with new ideas and strategies to help BCBSMA work towards achieving its community service mission and vision. The Council acts as a sounding board for ideas about volunteer activities, provides important recommendations on how to move forward with various BlueCrew projects and discusses how to better engage their colleagues’ passions through volunteer work. The BlueCrew Leadership Council came up with an idea called Service Day in which BCBSMA employees volunteer on the same day to maximize their efforts, to show solidarity and to exemplify the company’s dedication to serving the community. The idea for Service Day was quickly approved and endorsed by BCBSMA President and CEO, Andrew Dreyfus, who became one of the campaign’s internal champions. BlueCrew Leadership Council members note this executive leadership support and encouragement as crucial to the success of Service Day.

COMPANY-WIDE SERVICE DAY: ONE COMMUNITY. ONE BLUE.
In order to decide where employees would volunteer on Service Day, BCBSMA released a Request for Proposals (RFP) to all organizations with which BCBSMA or BCBSMA Foundation had previously worked. The RFP was a major asset to the selection process because it ensured that the health plan was meeting the needs and service visions of its community partners and that the non-profits were prepared to host large numbers of volunteers at one time. Organizations that won the RFP were granted five thousand dollars to buy the equipment and supplies needed to host the large number of volunteers.
on that day. The first company-wide Service Day was held in 2011, and during this event BlueCrew Leadership Council members served as team leads, managing the deployment of their colleagues and company resources. Prior to Service Day, Council members met regularly to plan for the statewide activities and to brainstorm how to engage their fellow employees to encourage participation.

BCBSMA was committed to engaging as many employees as possible in Service Day activities, however the health plan’s responsibilities precluded it from simply shutting down for the day. Instead, certain service activities were brought to the BCBSMA call centers and essential employees were able to participate in rotating shifts.

Crossroads for Kids was one of many organizations that benefited from Service Day. BCBSMA volunteers assisted Crossroads for Kids staff in painting the cabins that were used during summer camp and cleaning up the campgrounds. BlueCrew Leadership Council Members acknowledged that the kindness and competence of the Crossroads for Kids staff had a major impact on the positive attitudes that prevailed throughout the day. It was this positive relationship, in addition to Crossroads for Kids’ well-organized staff, which led BCBSMA to consider Crossroads for Kids as a candidate for an innovative new pilot project, Professional Mentoring Partnerships.

**PROFESSIONAL MENTORING PARTNERSHIPS**

The Professional Mentoring Partnerships (PMP) program was designed to support community-based, non-profit organizations, going above and beyond the provision of one-time volunteer support. Recognizing that the talent and expertise of its workers is the company’s greatest strength, BCBSMA wanted to find a way to deploy those talents more strategically in the community. BCBSMA decided to work with Common Impact, an organization that specializes in helping companies leverage the civic engagement of their employees to create skill-based volunteer programs. Before launching the PMP program company wide, BCBSMA decided to pilot the program with an organization that the health plan was confident had the capacity and desire to commit to a more in-depth arrangement.

BCBSMA pitched the idea to Crossroads for Kids because of its history of positive partnership experiences and good working relationships and because BCBSMA had an understanding of organizational capacity at Crossroads for Kids. Crossroads wanted guidance about how to achieve its goal of increasing the number of young people it serves while maintaining the program’s high quality. The Professional Mentoring Partnerships program was designed as a three- to five-month engagement where professionals from BCBSMA were matched with professionals at Crossroads for Kids to help Crossroads achieve its strategic goals.

After drafting a memorandum of understanding between Crossroads for Kids and BCBSMA, Common Impact helped BCBSMA choose particular employees whose skills and expertise would best assist Crossroads for Kids in meeting its goal. The mentoring partners therefore included employees with expertise in finance, human resources and training. They worked with Crossroads to create a staffing plan and financial model to fully understand the implications of growing the program. Program participants met at least bi-weekly in person or over the phone to discuss progress and issues. Crossroads for Kids decided to grow its program of 500 youth by 50 youth at a time and plans to continue to work towards its overall goal of serving 800 young people over the next three years.

As the PMP program pilot came to an end, Crossroads for Kids was given the opportunity to apply to BCBSMA for a ten thousand dollar grant to continue working toward meeting its strategic goals. Crossroads for Kids received the grant and is currently using the funds to train staff to effectively manage resources while implementing its strategic plan. Crossroads for Kids plans to begin enrolling new youth in year-round programs next year. The PMP program pilot with Crossroads for Kids was so successful that BCBSMA expanded the program this year to serve an additional nine organizations.

**KEYS FOR SUCCESS**

BCBSMA credits much of its success with Service Day and the Professional Mentorship Partnership program to the company’s history of social consciousness, including the BlueCrew. A key to the success of BCBSMA’s community efforts, according to the health plan, is its commitment to allowing its non-profit partners to inform the scope of the projects so that the focus is on the real needs of the community. The RFP process for the company-wide Service Day serves as an example of how BCBSMA allowed potential partners to drive the day’s goals and objectives. This ensured that organizations not only wanted to host volunteers but also had the internal capacity to do so. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts cites four essential components in all of its company-sponsored volunteer programs:

- trust and commitment from both parties involved
- senior leadership support at the highest levels of each organization
- tailoring opportunities to speak to both business and community needs
- utilizing employees’ unique skills while being faithful to the Blue Cross Blue Shield brand

“BCBSMA doesn’t have just one set volunteer engagement opportunity, and that’s important! It allows for multiple touch points to engage employees’ unique talents.”

— Crossroads for Kids Senior Staff Member

**ABOUT NIHCM FOUNDATION, BCBS OF MASSACHUSETTS AND CROSSROADS FOR KIDS**

The National Institute for Health Care Management (NIHCM) Foundation works to engage health insurers in educational activities to improve their programs and policies on maternal, child and adolescent health issues. Our Promising Practices program was created to recognize these emerging and promising programs.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. Celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2012, BCBSMA is committed to working with others in a spirit of shared responsibility to make quality health care affordable. Consistent with its corporate promise to always put our 2.8 million members first, BCBSMA is rated among the nation’s best health plans for member satisfaction and quality.

Crossroads for Kids inspires at-risk youth to develop their innate potential to become members of the next generation of diverse young leaders in Boston and Massachusetts. Through a unique combination of immersive summer camp and year-round mentoring and enrichment programs, Crossroads provides youth ages 7 – 18 years old with comprehensive support, resources and opportunities which guide them toward academic success, higher education, meaningful careers and responsible citizenship.