

RISE PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

PHILADELPHIA YOUTH BASKETBALL



OVERVIEW

From its founding in 2015, Philadelphia Youth Basketball (PYB) has always been a youth development organization committed to driving and measuring impact. But the nonprofit has recently upped its game by teaming up with The RISE Partnership.

RISE stands for **Readiness, Implementation, Sustainability** for **Effectiveness** and is a three-year learning program that helps non-profit organizations in the Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey region strengthen their impact. The Partnership builds on similar efforts by Philadelphia's Scattergood Foundation and The Consultation Center at Yale, and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and has the backing of the United Way of Greater Philadelphia & Southern New Jersey and other local foundations.

PYB, which uses a holistic approach — providing access, exposure, and opportunity — to build young people as students, athletes, and leaders, was one of 15 organizations selected to participate in the RISE Partnership’s initial “Implementation” phase. Participants will leave the program with improved capacity to collect, use, and apply data to deliver even stronger results.

“While many service providing organizations view data and evaluation as offensive — treating poor black and brown children as lab rats or using it simply to chase grant money — our entire staff are excited about using data so we can do our work smarter and more impactfully,” says Kenny Holdsman, President & CEO. “Two of our staff — Peter Kaffenberger and Randy Butler — have been working with RISE and have taken our ability to capture data to a much deeper level to fuel our continuous improvement. Randy might do a workshop on trauma using a Social and Emotional Learning framework and data. And the whole room is captivated by this notion that they are getting tools to be even more effective practitioners.”

“

If quantitative data is the skeleton of the body, qualitative data is the connective tissue that ties it all together. Pete’s foresight in doing a survey during the pandemic this way really helped to advance the work of the organization.

As part of RISE, Kaffenberger and Butler work with two consultants from The Consultation Center at Yale University — Derrick Gordon and Joy Kaufman — every two to three weeks.

“Having access to really smart people that have been doing this work for years like Derrick, Joy, and the folks at RISE, is invaluable,” says Kaffenberger.

Gordon and Kaufman help the PYB team figure out the best measurement evaluation practices. During COVID-19, a time when PYB has switched to a virtual program, the group decided it was best to pivot to qualitative data analysis. Kaffenberger developed a survey, which was sent by text to the young people of PYB. The kids responded via text to open-ended questions.

“Working regularly with quantitative and qualitative data as tools can help build programs and build them more effectively,” says Gordon. “If quantitative data is the skeleton of the body, qualitative data is the connective tissue that ties it all together. Pete’s foresight in doing a survey during the pandemic this way really helped to advance the work of the organization.”



Randy Butler and Eric Worley of PYB at a RISE event.

PYB learned from the survey how much the kids value the program and its positive emotional impact. The data showed that the coaches understand the organization's mission and effectively communicate results in a positive way.

One surprise learning was that while many students sign up to participate mainly to play basketball, and perhaps struggled initially with the academic component of the program, they ultimately deeply value it.

PYB also learned that that they are giving kids a window to the world through some of their learning modules. The Meek Mill module, about American rapper Meek Mill's ongoing battle with the U.S. justice system after a disputed conviction in 2007, focuses on racism in the criminal justice system and was a clear favorite of many students.

"A lot of middle school kids in Philadelphia don't get a chance to understand these issues and develop a point of view and write and debate it," says Holdsman. "We wanted to build a program that joins athletics and academics, especially real world, contextual learning. 'Why are there not more black coaches?' This is the stuff that middle school kids in high poverty areas want to get their teeth into."

PYB is using what they learn through RISE and with the help of the Yale consultants to collect meaningful data and use it to enhance their capacity and further improve their services.

"In the midst of a double crisis, and with budget cuts on the horizon, now is the time for organizations to show their impact and fight for racial justice," says Joe Pyle, President of The Scattergood Foundation. "Nonprofits need to improve their efficiency and effectiveness and the only way to do that is to know what's working and what isn't."

PYB is doing just that.

“

Our work with RISE and the crisis has helped us get smarter,” says Holdsman. “We have actually grown our capacity over the past couple of months.”

