



**create
knowledge.**

**ignite
change.**

john w. gardner
center for youth and their communities
stanford university

“Informed Americans have finally awakened to the importance of youth development broadly conceived. *If you want to train leaders you have to start early. ... We have to conduct research, educate a wider public, and mobilize citizen allies. We have to persuade diverse groups to work together—schools, social agencies, the faith community, law enforcement, all levels of government.*

“As the movement proceeds nationally, *the Gardner Center is prepared to work with other universities and youth development centers across the nation to ensure broad participation.*”

— John Gardner

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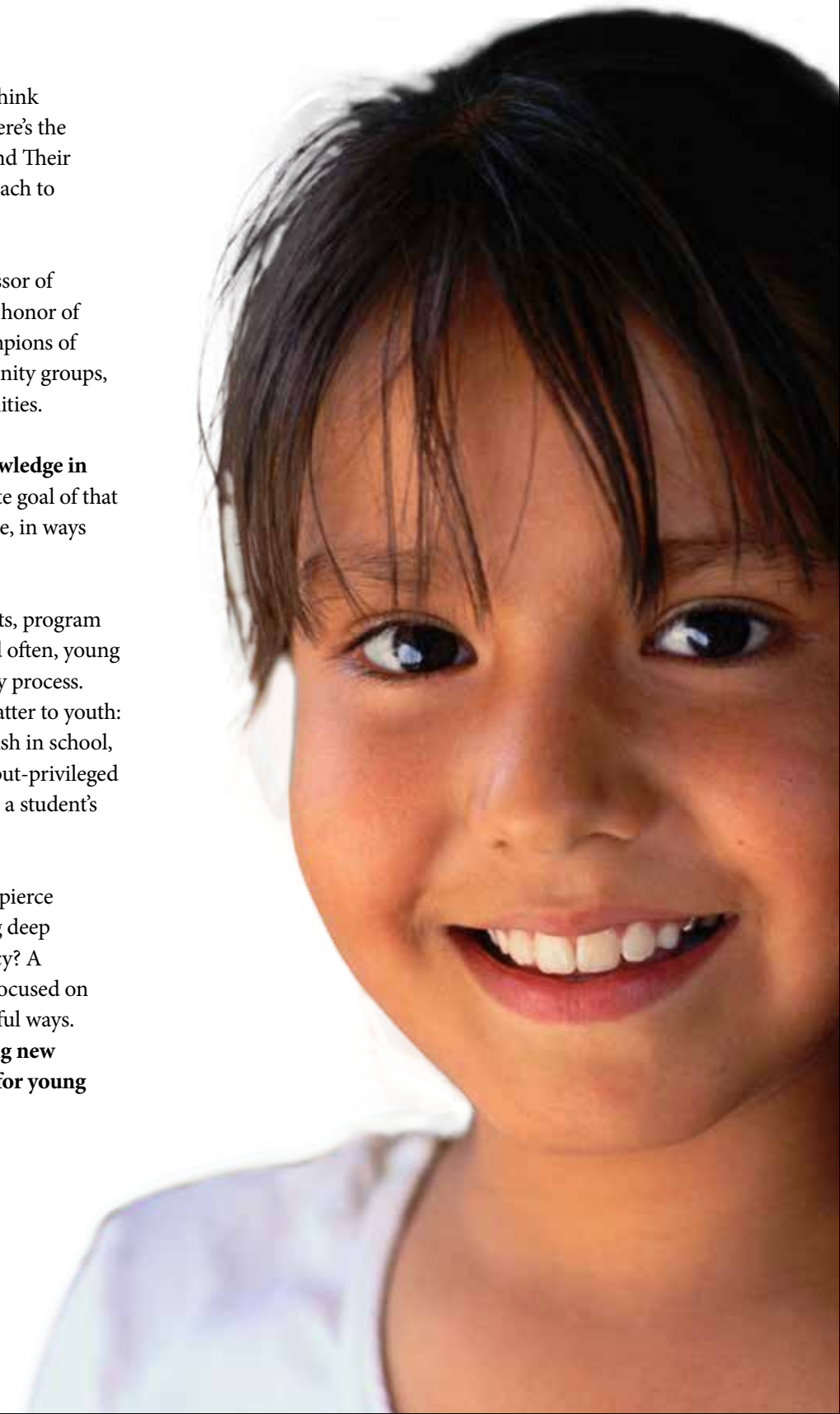
There are academic institutions. There are think tanks. There are communities. And then there's the John W. Gardner Center (JGC) for Youth and Their Communities – Stanford's innovative approach to leveraging the strengths of all three.

JGC, founded by Stanford University Professor of Education Milbrey McLaughlin, is named in honor of John Gardner, one of the world's great champions of “muddy boots” – engaging schools, community groups, and funders to invest in their own communities.

JGC is a place with a mission: **creating knowledge in communities to ignite change.** The ultimate goal of that change? Improving the lives of young people, in ways that are tailored to today's communities.

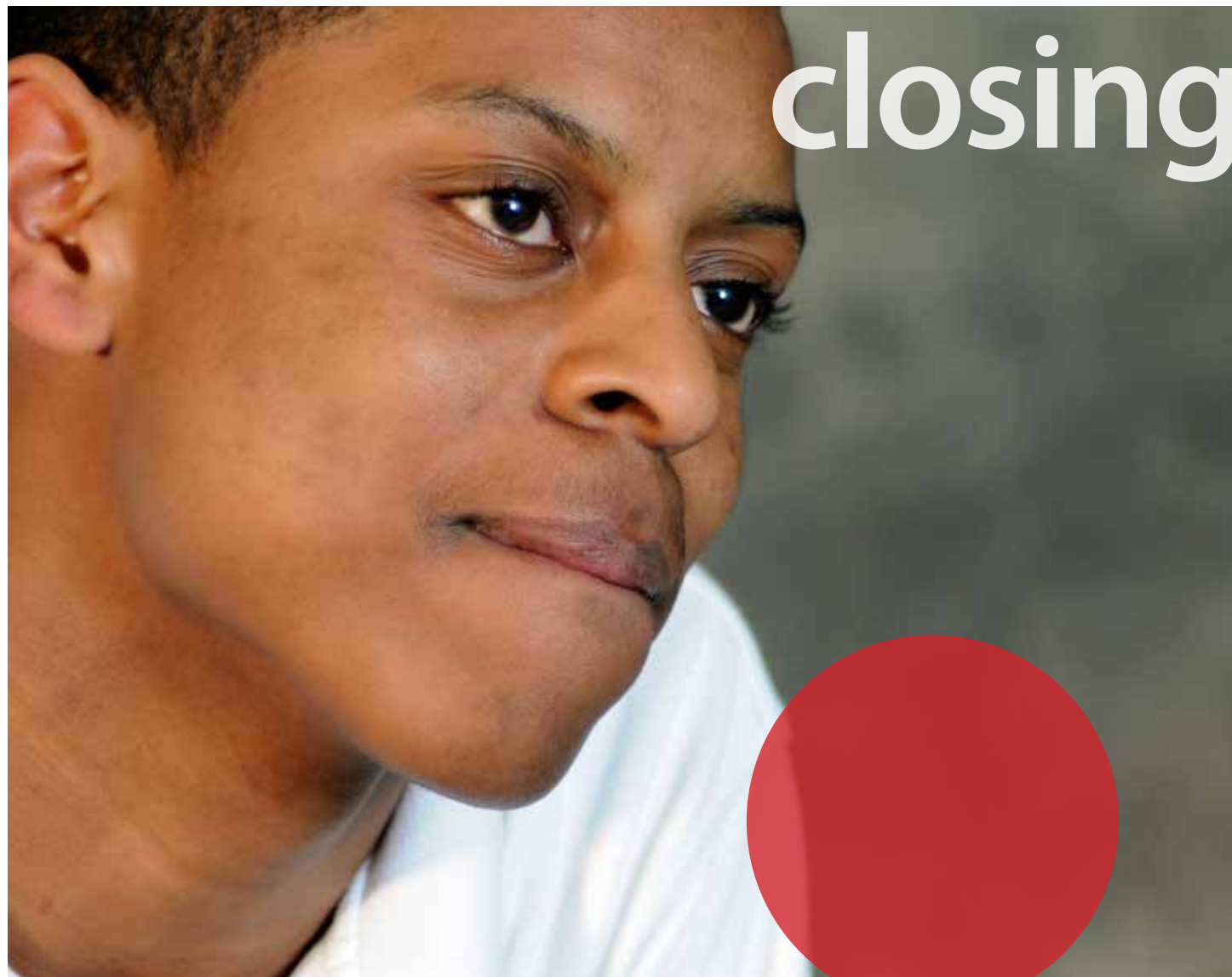
At JGC, researchers, students, policy analysts, program directors, civic and community leaders, and often, young people themselves collaborate in a discovery process. These partners dive deep into issues that matter to youth: what role health plays in the ability to flourish in school, how the arts could transform an anything-but-privileged community, what factors help – or hinder – a student's ability to succeed in college.

Gardner saw JGC as a constructive way to “pierce the eucalyptus curtain,” a means to building deep partnerships with the community. His legacy? A rigorous, university-based research center focused on work that will affect communities in powerful ways. Inspired by Gardner's vision, JGC is **creating new knowledge that ignites improved futures for young people.**



AT JGC, WE BELIEVE RESEARCH CAN BE THE IMPETUS FOR ACTION.

If we focus on issues raised by real people in real communities, we know we're addressing *actual* rather than theoretical challenges. Then, research findings translate into actionable opportunities, and that means communities can put those findings to work — in policy and practice.



That's how JGC works, following John Gardner's model for communities that flourish when "...continuous innovation, renewal and rebirth can occur." Progress happens not in silos, but through healthy, respectful collaborations. Ask the right questions, gather the right data, and the answers can lead to positive change.

the gap between research and practice

Youth Data Archive (YDA) is a comprehensive, one-of-a-kind research initiative that links data across schools, public agencies, and community-based organizations. Communities raise questions: What are the early-warning signals for a student about to go off the academic track? How can we "up the odds" for education success among young people placed in custody of the courts? How does the decline in recess and playtime in American schools affect young people? Using the YDA, communities get answers, and assistance in making tough decisions about the best places to invest time and resources.

Bridge to Success is a collaboration among educators and administrators (secondary and college) and JGC, created to boost the success of young people as they leave high school.

At the request of Bridge to Success and teaching teams at the San Francisco Unified School District and City College of San Francisco, JGC brought all partners together and added key community organizations to help address a key question: As young people make the transition from high school to college, what factors make the difference between success and failure?

Thanks to the Youth Data Archive, which studies data from multiple sources, educators now know what's critical and when it's critical to intervene. By studying student patterns of success and failure in key areas, Bridge to Success learned it was critical to pay attention to specific risk factors as early as eighth grade. Intervene too late, and chances for success plummet. Intervene at the right moment, and success in school is likely. And with success in school comes a jumpstart to compete effectively in the job market.

“ Students have to know that at the end, their prize is to compete for the very best jobs this world has to offer. ”

— Ed Lee, Mayor, San Francisco, May 2011,
Conference on Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Communities Learning in Partnership initiative

IMAGINE THIS: INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE IN PLANNING AND LEADING CHANGE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. In a tangible example of Gardner’s counsel (“If you want to train leaders, start early.”), JGC supports and guides young people as they learn a wide variety of important research methods. They put those new skills to immediate use — identifying needs in the community, analyzing their findings, developing plans for advocacy and action.



Students learn how to collaborate with adults, and they earn a place at the decision-making table. Developing policies and strategies with school leaders, city advisory board, and leaders of community organizations, students are involved in real challenges and develop real solutions. For many, it’s a transformative first step to learning what leadership is all about.

communities in action

YELL (Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning) was JGC’s first program. It began as a curriculum developed to give Redwood City and Oakland middle-school students an opportunity to shape not just their own experiences, but the experiences of their communities. By cultivating skills in research and analysis, by challenging students to identify and address needs, JGC helped launch more than 350 young people into action — from founding and leading nonprofit advocacy groups to tutoring and mentoring younger students. Today, the YELL approach is embedded in many JGC projects. Best of all, the curriculum is available online, free of charge, to any community that wants to involve youth in research and analysis.

Asset Mapping is a research tool that can be used to inventory out-of-school resources for young people in a particular geographic area.

In just one example of this tool’s impact, in 2009, community leaders in East Palo Alto and the Belle Haven neighborhood of Menlo Park came together to solve a mystery: In an area where young people faced multiple risks and had access to many out-of-school programs and opportunities, why weren’t more youth taking advantage of those programs?

Using a JGC purpose-built Asset Mapping tool, the communities tackled three key questions: Where were there gaps or duplications among existing programs? How did existing services intersect with the interests of young people? What factors inhibit or promote participation?

Community youth were trained to survey peers about interests. By the end of the process, the communities had a clear picture of what was going on, including gaps in what was available, nothing to do after 6 p.m. and on Saturdays, nothing sports-related for girls, issues access to locations and transit, and specific inhibitors, including crime “hot spots” in the community. Solutions became clearer — addressing barriers, publicizing programs in new ways, providing opportunities for multiple age groups in one location, and working across agencies to fill gaps.

“Through YELL, I learned real skills in research and analysis and gained confidence in myself. YELL changed my life.”

— Amalia, YELL alumna and college student.

THE FIELD OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IS GROWING. That’s the good news that guides JGC to share promising practices with communities, scholars, and policymakers committed to youth development around the country. JGC collaborations result in new and creative project and initiative designs and research methods. We learn something from every project —



insights, new models, next frontiers. We learn from successes and setbacks, and we share virtually everything — research results, tools, publications, and successful strategies for collaboration — with community groups and leaders who make policy decisions on the ground in communities throughout the country.

what works

Learning From Each Other
At JGC, we believe in the power of partnerships. That’s why we share what we learn with policy leaders, decision-makers, thought leaders, on the ground innovators and researchers working in youth development. We bring our expertise in data systems and capacity building to policy conversations at every level. And we distribute findings via scholarly journals and professional conferences.

Supporting Practitioners
We’re committed to the work of practitioners in the field, so we provide open-sources resources and tools for school and community leaders to use in fostering youth participation. We also offer the Community Schools Evaluation Toolkit, a practical, hands-on guide for developing measurements to identify and evaluate tangible results.

“ The Gardner Center takes the best qualities of a think tank and turns them into tools for use in and by the community. ”



— Patricia Brown, Director, Redwood City 2020

YOU CAN IGNITE CHANGE. Big ideas guide the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities. But each of these ideas only comes to life when collaborators — community partners, schools, policymakers, young people, and of course, supporters — come to the table. As John Gardner said, “All citizens should have the opportunity to be active, but all will not respond. Those who do respond carry the burden of our free society. I call them the Responsibles.”

The Responsibles exist in every segment of the communitybut they rarely form a network of responsibility for the community because often they don't know one another across segments. They must find each other; learn to communicate and find common ground. “ And as Gardner wisely points out, in the best of all possible worlds, it's never too early to start taking responsibility. That's why JGC's work focuses on collaboration, sharing resources, building partnerships. That's why our work engages not just with the people who care about youth development, but with young people themselves.

Communities flourish when we all participate — universities, youth, community and civic leaders, policy makers, schools, social service agencies, and researchers. To learn more about how creating knowledge truly *can* ignite change to improve the lives of youth, visit: jgc.stanford.edu or call: 650 723-1137.



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