

CREATING CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

LISTENING DIFFERENTLY

From Community Voice to Jr. Mercury

How a listening experiment helped us move beyond one-size-fits-all community solutions and changed how we meet community needs.

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THE STARTING POINT

A changing Valley called for a different approach...

Growth was not creating equal access, connection or opportunity for everyone.

The question was not, “What program should we add?”... It was, “How do we become a better point of connection for community well-being?”

Connect differently

Build relationships before designing the response.

Listen differently

Seek lived experience, patterns and aspirations.

Respond differently

Tailor programs with community, not simply for community.

THE EXPERIMENT

Creating Connected Communities changed the sequence

From program-first thinking to community-first learning.



CONNECT

Build trust with members,
families and partners.

LISTEN

Use deeper conversations,
not only traditional
surveys.

MAKE SENSE

Look for repeated needs,
assets and barriers.

ACT

Design a tailored response
with the right partners.

The experiment was not a new survey. It was a new relationship with community voice.

WHAT CHANGED

We listened for more than satisfaction

We listened for needs, barriers, aspirations and community assets.



THE SIGNAL

A clear need emerged: better sports experiences for girls

The pattern became visible because we were listening across conversations.

WHAT WE HEARD

- Girls were not staying engaged at the same rate as boys.
- Families wanted safe, supportive and welcoming spaces.
- Girls needed peers, female mentors and visible pathways to confidence.



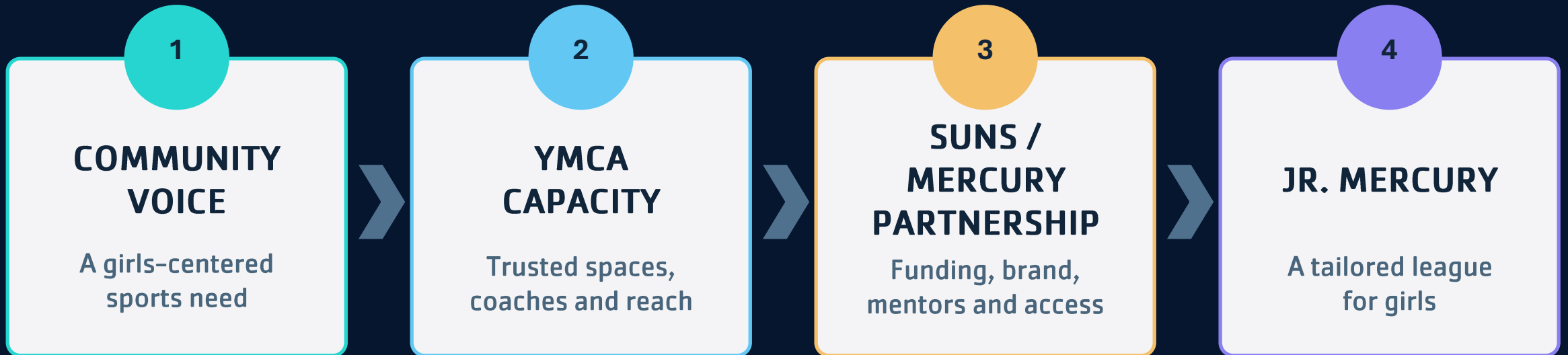
DESIGN OPPORTUNITY

Create a girls-centered basketball experience that removes barriers and builds confidence, belonging and connection.

FROM INSIGHT TO ACTION

The right partnership made the response possible

Community voice defined the need. Partnership created the pathway.



The program was built at the intersection of voice, capacity and partnership.

THE PROGRAM RESPONSE

Jr. Mercury removed barriers and added belonging

Basketball became the platform. Confidence and empowerment became the purpose.

ACCESS

First season and jersey at no cost

BELONGING

Girls play with peers in a supportive environment

MENTORSHIP

Female coaches and volunteers model possibility

EMPOWERMENT

Confidence, health and dreams extend beyond the court

THE EXPERIENCE

Empowerment Day turns the promise into a capstone

Players see, practice and name the confidence they are building.



MOVE

Basketball and health activities



IMAGINE

Vision boards and goal-setting



REFLECT

Personal empowerment phrases



CONNECT

Mercury players and female volunteers

The capstone connects skill-building on the court to confidence beyond it.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The strongest solutions are discovered with community

Jr. Mercury became evidence for a repeatable way of working.

LISTEN BEFORE DESIGNING

Community voice reveals the real problem to solve.

LOOK LEFT AND RIGHT

Connect people, assets and partners already present.

TAILOR THE RESPONSE

Move away from one-size-fits-all programs.

KEEP LISTENING

Use participant feedback to improve as needs evolve.

WHAT THIS INFLUENCED

The Valley of the Sun YMCA will be a BEACON IN THE DESERT

With a priority to Be Well. Do Good. Lead Change.

5 YEAR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Our Metro Board committed to LISTEN DIFFERENTLY to inform our new Strategic Direction.

Our Vision for Impact is to be a beacon of wellness and hope, ensuring everyone can access the Y and reach their full potential in a vibrant, well-connected center for community well-being. Driven by our **Guiding Principle**—that membership means more than self-care; it's a promise to grow, give back, and help your community thrive—this plan sets the direction for lasting impact.

CENTERS OF COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

Transform our YMCA's to be hubs for community resource and connection. More than a gym, swim or childcare. A place where every community member belongs.

LET THE COMMUNITY INFORM THE PATH

Connect Differently. Listen Differently. Respond Differently. Prioritize Community Voice.

THE PATH FORWARD

Centers of Community Well-Being begin with a new posture

Not “we have the answer,” but “we will listen, connect and build with you.”



When community voice leads, the Beacon becomes visible.