

FOSTERING THE FUTURE

SIX YEARS IN REVIEW



The mural represented on the front cover was created by Fostering the Future youth participants in cooperation with the Mural, Music and Arts Project. *Nurturing Today* took over six months to design and create, stands five feet by ten feet and is in two segments so it can be easily moved from place to place. It has been on exhibit in the San Mateo County courthouse, the San Mateo County Human Services Agency, the San Mateo Garden Center as well as in its permanent home at StarVista.

The idea of the futuristic mother earth, with a strong embrace around the world, was taken directly from the class notes and student drawings. Her hands resting under her pregnant belly symbolize her care and love for children of the world. The youth drew up a list of positive words describing their ideal future. Pulling from the "top ten" on this list, the left side of the mural depicts two youth, 'confident' and 'determined', 'supporting one another' on the road to a positive future. They are taking the 'initiative' to climb the stairs before them and to avoid the negative obstacles that are figuratively represented by the concentric circles on the far left. The backpacks are rendered to represent different flags alluding to the cultural backgrounds of the Fostering the Future participants.



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INTRODUCTION

In 2010, California had more than 63,000 children in its foster care system, and approximately 22% were 16 to 20 years of age.¹ Federal law mandates that child welfare agencies be responsible for the safety and well being of these young people, and since the enactment of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, permanent placement for each child has also been a priority. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008 was enacted to strengthen the nation-wide desire that every child in foster care leave the system with a permanent family through either safe reunification with birth parents, or adoption by a new family or guardianship. Even with these mandates in place, a percentage of youth leave foster care at the age of majority (age 18 in California) without a bond to a permanent family. These youth are said to “age out” of the foster care system. In California, as well as in the rest of the nation, this population has steadily risen. In 1998, nearly 18,000 children aged out of the system, by 2006 that number had increased by nearly 50% to more than 26,000 youth nationwide.² The court systems, child welfare practitioners and federal law all have recognized the critical need to assist these youth in transitioning from foster care to independent adulthood.

Recent studies that have examined this transition have found that these young people face significant challenges. A seminal report, *The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth*, for example, found that youth transitioning out of foster care without a permanent link to a family experience significant mental and physical health problems, are often unemployed or underemployed, face homelessness and housing instability and are at great risk of becoming involved in crime or becoming victims of crime.³

Fostering the Future was San Mateo County’s answer to the call to ensure a better future for young adults aging-out of the foster care system.

In 2005, the Center for Venture Philanthropy met with the San Mateo County Human Services Agency to outline a partnership to assist foster youth in San Mateo County. Shortly after this initial meeting, youth living with relatives other than their birth parents were added to the target audience as they often have similar life outcomes and may suffer from the same attachment disorders as youth in foster care. The initiative was launched as a collaboration of several community-based organizations and government agencies to address the challenges faced by these youth, while also helping build their resiliency skills. The partnership included StarVista (formerly Youth and Family Enrichment Services), Edgewood Center for Children and Families, San Mateo County Office of Education, Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County, the Human Services Agency of San Mateo County and the San Mateo County Community College District. CASA of San Mateo County was a consulting partner at the beginning of the initiative and the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley later replaced Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County. The John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes and Opportunity Fund joined as partners later in the development of the initiative.

To better understand the contributions of the initiative and its community partners, a summary of the historical context is provided next.

¹ AFCARS, October 1, 2008 to September 30, 2009 data run. Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau. Data obtained April 13, 2011.

² *Time for Reform: Preventing Youth from Aging Out On Their Own*. Kids Are Waiting, Fix Foster Care Now. 2009 (updated report). Retrieved on April 13, 2011 from www.kidsarewaiting.org.

³ Courtney, M., Dworsky, A, et al, 2005. *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth*. Chicago: Chapin Hall, University of Chicago, Retrieved from <http://www.chapinhall.org>

Historical Background

Venture Philanthropy as a Funding Approach

As with its counterpart in business, venture philanthropy applies selected venture capital strategies, resources and business skills to charitable giving. The Center for Venture Philanthropy (CVP) applies five key elements:

1. investment in a long-term (three-to six-year) plan for social change
2. a managing partner relationship
3. an accountability-for-results process
4. provision of cash and expertise
5. an exit strategy

CVP was launched in 1999 by the Peninsula Community Foundation (which merged with the Community Foundation of Silicon Valley in 2007 to form the Silicon Valley Community Foundation) to create an environment where community donors could collaborate and drive positive change in Silicon Valley. Investors worked directly with CVP staff and the leaders of nonprofit organizations to understand community and nonprofit concerns and solve problems.

With each social venture strategy, donors invest in multi-year business plans that tackle persistent community problems. These investments are strategic, usually focused on a single social problem and have the potential for a tremendous social return on investment. Specifically, investment dollars support the work of multiple nonprofit partners who seek to develop new, or strengthen existing, programs and services. An investment council was created and composed of interested investors and top executives from the partner agencies. They met quarterly to offer expertise and advice on overall direction of FTF. A steering committee made up of working partners met more frequently to coordinate the work on the ground.

The initiative was a six-year effort by CVP to invest in the lives of San Mateo County children in foster or kinship care between the ages of 14 and 25. The focus was on quality of life issues, specifically developing the skills needed to become as independent as possible at age 18, leaving the safety concerns to the county's appropriate governmental agency. Its vision was that youth in foster and kinship care have the assets, skills and connections needed to become healthy, productive adults by age 25.

Project Framework

Federal and State child advocates both recognize the critical need to assist young people as they transition from being in foster care to becoming independent adults. The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 – commonly referred to as the Chafee Act – provides federal dollars for services including life skills instruction, mentoring, education, employment preparation and mental health care. Youth who age out of foster care face multiple challenges to future success. They often have difficulties in securing employment and housing; they are at risk of becoming involved in crime and subsequent incarceration; and they face significant physical and mental health problems.

To address these challenges, the initiative set out in 2005 to accomplish three main goals through a combination of both direct services and systems change (see Figure 1 below). The direct service component of the initiative was designed around an asset-team approach which offered the following: 1) asset coaches to work directly with youth, both individually and in groups, to help develop life goals and future pathways; 2) a housing advocate to help youth find and retain housing through skills development and 3) a legal advocate to meet legal needs of current and emancipated youth. The systems component was in turn addressed through trainings (e.g., legal advocate provided training to caregivers, social workers and school personnel about the needs of children in foster care) and cross-agency close collaboration and public policy advocacy.

Figure 1 – Fostering the Future’s Original Goals, 2005

GOAL	BENCHMARK
Goal 1: Offer Supports and Opportunities to Youth	By participating in asset development opportunities, youth: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain connections to peers, adults and their community • Improve life skills • Develop a strong and healthy sense of self • Build hope for their future By receiving legal support, youth: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase their knowledge of their legal rights and obligations • Improve education, housing and health-related outcomes by the mitigation of legal barriers
Goal 2: Catalyze Local Systems Change	Fostering the Future has systemic impact in San Mateo County, as measured by new, improved ways of doing business that deliver improved outcomes for youth. This systemic change will include new ways of collecting and analyzing data, new forms of cooperation and communication and new alignment of resources that encourage breakthrough strategies.
Goal 3: Effect Public Policy Change	Fostering the Future engages in regional and statewide collaborations to inform policy and practice.
Goal 4: Measure Impact and Disseminate Lessons Learned	A series of evaluations are conducted to improve the Fostering the Future practice and inform the field.
Goal 5: Develop and Leverage Resources	Private, foundation, government funding and other resources are combined to support the goals of the Fostering the Future plan.

Initiative’s Efforts, Programs and Timeline of Activities

With the initiative’s goals in place, specific programs and other efforts were created, starting in 2005. Over the years other programs were started and ended, depending upon opportunities, funding and success of the effort. Each of those is described below.

Asset Coaching – This core program was designed to help youth identify goals in their lives, whether short-term (e.g., pass an exam or make the football team) or longer term (e.g., attend a four-year university or become a phlebotomist) and develop a strategy and plan for attaining that goal. Three full-time asset coaches were hired to work with the youth, one with middle school students, one with high school youth and the third with young adults over age 18. The theory was that by working one-on-one with the youth to create a pathway to reaching their goal, the coaches could help them develop a sense of purpose, a positive view about their future, strong self-esteem and personal power.

Initially, the asset coaches worked from within two organizations – StarVista and Edgewood Center– but due to extensive staff turnover in 2007 and 2008, and an overall programmatic shift to agency core competencies in 2008, the asset-coaching program at StarVista was closed. From 2009 to 2011, asset-coaching services were provided solely through Edgewood and the coaching model changed to a family-conferencing model. In this model, youth were asked to select a group of individuals (from family, school and community) who would serve as a resource for them as they embarked on their journey towards accomplishing their goals. They were developing their own support system. Referrals to outside services were also provided to youth, on an as-needed basis.

Legal Support – Another core service was provided by the full-time legal advocate who worked with youth in and from San Mateo County to help them resolve and advocate for issues ranging from school placement and eligibility for special education to dependency rights and access to public benefits for which they were eligible. The legal advocate also provided training sessions for foster youth, caregivers, service providers, school board members and school district personnel on youths’ legal rights.

Youth Financial Independence (Y-FI) – This program provided financial education and training to foster and kinship youth in an effort to promote financial literacy and economic self-sufficiency. Prior to enrolling, youth must have attended an orientation and completed an eight-hour financial education class. In order to successfully complete the program, youth had to save a minimum of \$20 every month, or at least on a regular basis, and designate these savings to purchase an identified asset goal (e.g., vehicle, security deposit and post-secondary education). Their own savings were matched 2:1, up to a \$2,000 maximum, and were to be spent by the end of their two-year savings period.

This program was made possible with the collaboration of San Mateo County’s Human Service Agency, through its Independent Living Program, StarVista and Opportunity Fund (a community development financial institution based in San Jose).

While Y-FI enrollment stopped in 2010, in the spring of 2011, emancipated youth in San Mateo County’s transitional housing program were offered the chance to participate in Start2Save, a new program created by Opportunity Fund. This program was geared toward individuals with very limited income and assets and was designed to provide financial education and help them establish a savings account to cover unexpected or emergency expenses.

Housing Advocacy – With a \$200,000 grant from the Foster Youth Housing Initiative, FTF hired a housing advocate to work through StarVista with youth to secure stable housing as they transitioned out of foster care. Additionally, the housing advocate created a comprehensive housing skills curriculum and training for youth to better prepare them to move into independent living situations when they reach emancipation. She also worked with landlords in an effort to have them agree to rent to foster youth when vacancies occurred. The grant ended in 2008.

Youth Consulting Council – This youth leadership body of FTF worked with staff to design and implement new programs, activities and events while gaining valuable leadership skills and experience. They began in 2006, and their first activities included planning group outings to a Giants game and Marine World and creating a portable mural. A group of eight youth also attended the Casey Family Program conference, *It’s My Life*, in 2006.

California Youth Connection – The initiative sponsored creation of a San Mateo County chapter of the California Youth Connection, a policy advocacy organization whose members include current and former foster youth. Chapter members led a training session for adults across the county to help them learn how to successfully solicit and engage youth on boards and commissions. They also attended weekend trainings in

advocacy, helped draft legislation and lobbied elected officials in Sacramento to put supportive legislation into place.

Synergy Scholarship Fund (later renamed Mini Grants) – FTF solicited contributions from Peninsula Community Foundation, advised fund holders and created the Synergy Scholarship Fund to provide financial support to youth as they pursue an interest or activity to help them achieve their asset goal. Over the course of the initiative, a little over \$16,000 was given in grants for group activities and to youth and was spent on a ropes course, music lessons, college tours, SAT prep classes, volleyball camp, etc.

Community Hour – This program started in mid-2008 and offered weekly drop-in group activities. It was meant to help youth develop a sense of community with their peers. Two groups met weekly, one in San Mateo and the other in East Palo Alto.

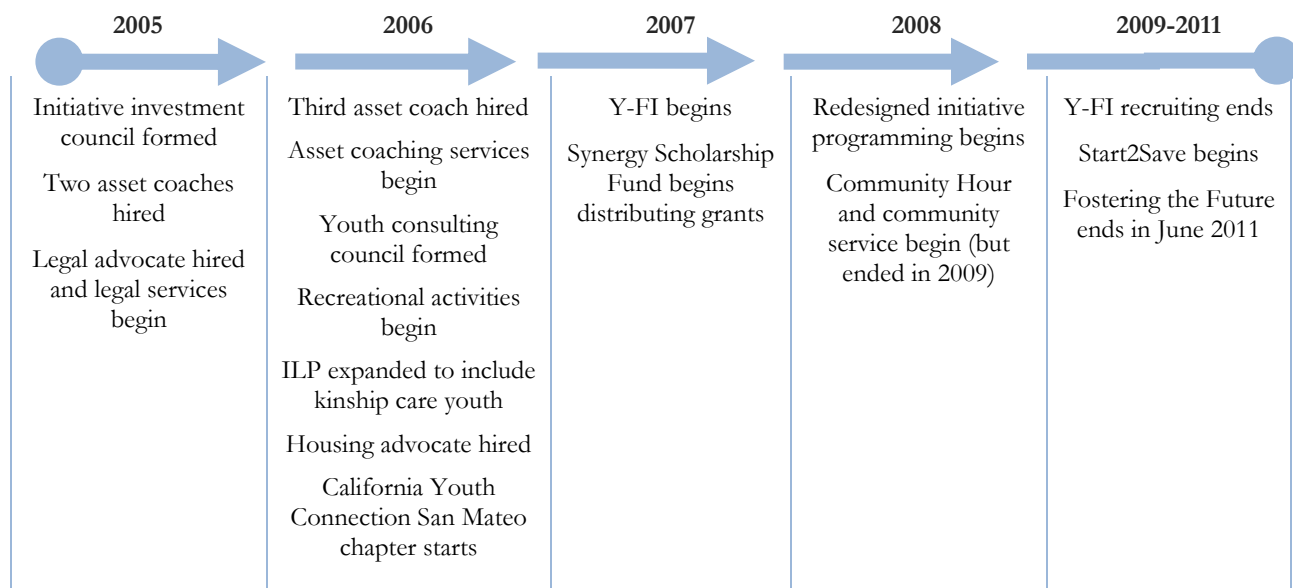
Recreational Activities – These activities created opportunities for youth to connect with one another, take risks, have fun and hone their talents and interests. They were offered through community hour and asset coaching and were often planned and coordinated by the Youth Consulting Council.

Community Service – Youth participated in community service activities to learn tangible ways to strengthen their sense of community by helping others. These opportunities were offered primarily through community hour and included volunteering at the Second Harvest Food Bank and working with senior adults at Lytton Gardens.

Timeline of Activities

Provided below is FTF’s timeline, depicting the starting points of the various programs and efforts. As seen in the figure below, the investment council was formed at the end of 2005, and the bulk of the programs/efforts were phased in during 2006. As new funding and opportunities developed, additional efforts were added in 2007 and 2008. The initiative formally ended on June 30, 2011.

Figure 2 – Timeline of Activities



Evaluation Efforts

Applied Survey Research (ASR), a nonprofit social research firm, was hired as the initiative's evaluator in 2007. Preliminary evaluation work soon pointed out that the initiative's goals and activities were not in clear alignment with each other and the leadership began a redesign effort.⁴

The purpose of the evaluation was to demonstrate whether: 1) the redesigned initiative operated as it had intended, 2) it collaborated with the necessary complementary systems and 3) the new configuration of the initiative could deliver meaningful short-term changes in the lives of the youth it served. The first evaluation effort consisted of updating FTF's logic model (in fall 2007) with the help of FTF's staff, investors and program youth, in order to develop an evaluation plan for the program. Once the theory of change had been revised, ASR worked closely with staff to generate a list of research questions that ultimately guided the work of this evaluation.

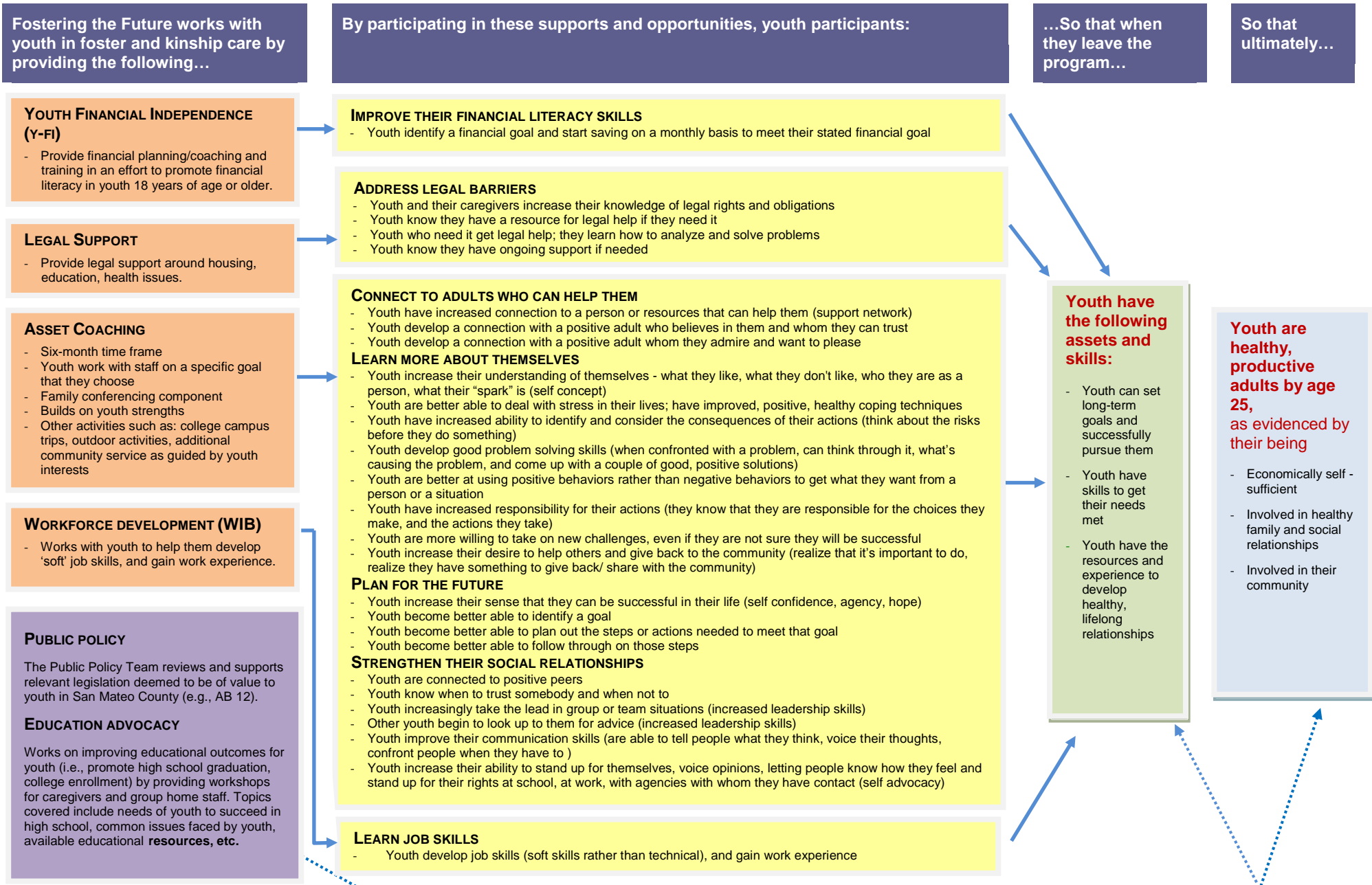
Theory of Change

The process by which the initiative's efforts were anticipated to bring about outcomes and meet its goals are illustrated in the logic model on the following page (a summary of which is provided below).

- Through their participation in **asset coaching**, youth would build connections to adults, learn more about themselves, plan for their future and strengthen their social relationships.
- Through their participation in **Y-FI**, youth would improve their financial literacy skills and start saving money.
- By receiving **legal support**, youth would be better equipped to surmount legal barriers and advocate for themselves.
- The combined efforts of these three services, along with **workforce development, public policy and education advocacy**, would provide youth who leave the program with invaluable assets and skills (e.g., ability to set long-term goals, meet their financial needs and have the resources and experience to develop healthy, lifelong relationships).
- Finally, all of these efforts would culminate in reaching the initiative's long-term goal that youth would develop into healthy productive adults by age 25 (i.e., become economically self-sufficient, involved in healthy family and social relationships and involved in their community).

⁴ In 2007, the initiative decided to redesign the asset coach model upon realizing that this work had moved in a direction different than from originally intended. The redesign resulted in increased emphasis on participating youths' connection to one another, a clarification of the role of the asset coach, as well as the general length of time that youth and their coaches work together.

Figure 3 – Logic Model of Fostering the Future



Methodology

In collaboration with the initiative’s steering committee and staff, specific research questions were generated to investigate three main evaluation areas: 1) **process evaluation** – *is the initiative operating as intended?*; 2) **outcome evaluation** – *are the services effective?*; and 3) **systems evaluation** – *is the initiative influencing the wider system of care for foster and kinship youth?*

Figure 4 – Evaluation Questions

LEVEL	QUESTION
Process-related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is being served? • How are the initiative’s participants linked to the larger network of community or social services? • Are participating youth building a community of support while in the initiative’s programs? • How do staff members experience the redesigned initiative model?
Outcome-related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the FTF model increase youth assets?
Systems-related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What systems has the initiative targeted, for what purpose and how have they changed? • How has the initiative infused youth development principles into related systems?

Please note that while these research questions guided the evaluation efforts, the evaluation findings discussed in the sections that follow are organized by the initiative’s goals (see page 8).

Data collection methods

To obtain a complete picture of the impact of the initiative, ASR relied on a combination of nine data collection tools. A description of each measure is provided below.

Youth Survey – The youth survey was designed to capture short-term outcomes in four domains across all programs: 1) Increased connections with positive adults, 2) Increased connections with positive peers, 3) Increased self-awareness and self-efficacy and 4) Increased planning for the future. These four domains, and the indicators within each, are from Fostering the Future’s logic model and have been aligned with comparable indicators from validated scales. In addition, these indicators were pilot-tested with youth to ensure that the wording was youth-friendly and that they could be impacted by the initiative’s efforts. Each survey item was measured on a 4-point scale, ranging from “not at all true” (1) to “very much true” (4).

The initiative’s staff members were instructed to administer the pre-survey at the end of their second contact with the youth, and to administer the post-survey three months thereafter. To preserve the privacy of youths’ feedback, youth were instructed to place their completed surveys in sealed envelopes, which were then mailed directly to the researchers for data entry. Youth were compensated with a \$5 gift card for each survey completed.

It should be mentioned that while the survey was originally designed to capture the concerted efforts of all three primary programs – asset coaching, community hour and legal support – the great majority of the surveys were completed by asset-coached youth, who, in most cases did not have any contact with the other two programs. As mentioned earlier, community hour stopped being offered shortly after the launch of the surveys; and while legal support continued to be part of the initiative, the program discontinued the use of the surveys with its clients due to the length of time that typically elapsed in between contacts.

It is also worth pointing out that asset coaching and legal support experienced challenges with the administration process of the survey, which in turn impacted the overall number of surveys completed (in particular, the number of matched pre/post surveys). The challenges were primarily due to common circumstances faced by foster and kinship youth, ranging from developmental disabilities, juvenile hall detention and other debilitating crises. Consequentially, very few youth (four) had completed both a pre and post survey.

Staff Observations – This form was designed to serve as a companion tool to the youth survey by providing a more objective perspective on youths’ self-reported strengths. The content of the form mirrored that used in the youth survey, and the completion of this form coincided with the administration of the youth survey. Each survey item was measured on a 4-point scale, ranging from “not at all true” (1) to “very much true” (4). Initially, staff from all programs (except the legal advocate) were tasked with the completion of staff observation forms, but, due to programmatic changes along the way (see the initiative’s timeline of activities on page 10), the asset-coaching program was the only program using this form. Staff members were instructed to mail their forms to the researchers soon after completion.

Asset Coaching Monthly Logs (service data) – To supplement the data captured in both the youth survey and staff observation forms, a log was created to include youths’ goals and completion status of each goal, number of contacts/meetings with youth, referrals, program status (active or inactive), along with other basic demographic information. This log was updated on a monthly basis and sent to the researchers.

Youth Financial Independence (Y-FI) Survey – The Y-FI survey was designed to capture ways youth benefited from their participation. Two surveys were created: one for active Y-FI youth and another for those who had graduated from the program. Y-FI staff members were instructed to hand out the survey to their current Y-FI enrollees, and to mail a blank survey to the program’s graduates. Once youth completed their surveys, they mailed them back directly to the researchers in self-addressed, stamped envelopes. Youth were compensated with a \$10 gift card for completing a survey.

Key Informant Interviews – In May of 2010, the researchers conducted phone interviews with eight key stakeholders who represented a range of perspectives: an investment council member, an angel investor, a dependency attorney, FTF’s service providers, county service providers and a policy maker. The intention behind these interviews was to gain an understanding of the extent to which the initiative impacted the various systems targeted.

Youth Interviews – In December 2008, the researchers conducted interviews with 13 youth to understand the extent to which they experienced the outcomes desired by the initiative. The evaluators also learned through the process how youth conceptualized and verbalized the outcomes, which in turn helped refine the measurement tool.

Case Study – One-on-one interviews were conducted with nine asset-coached youth and their caregivers during the period starting December 2010 through February 2011. These interviews enabled the researchers to gain a richer understanding of how asset-coaching services impacted the lives of youth and, to some extent, caregivers.

Focus Groups – To gain further perspective into youths’ lives and experiences while participating in the initiative’s programs, youth were invited to participate in group discussions. The first focus group discussion was held in November 2009 with four community-hour youth, and the second focus group discussion was held in January 2010 with five asset-coached youth. In addition, the researchers also conducted a focus group with three staff members in December 2009 to learn from their experiences within their respective programs (i.e., legal support, community hour and asset coaching).

Document Review – Target summaries generated quarterly provided documentation on program implementation and numbers of youth reached. These were created by the initiative coordinator and distributed to the investment council and other interested individuals and contributed to this evaluation report.

Success Stories – The legal advocate provided brief accounts of many of her cases throughout the nearly six years of her work and the asset coach also provided brief written summaries during 2010 of youth progress and successes.

Organization of Findings

To highlight the efforts of the initiative during its six-year journey, the evaluation findings are organized into five main sections, with each section representing one of the initiative’s goals. Highlighted within each section are accomplishments, challenges and lessons learned.

GOAL 1: OFFER SUPPORTS & OPPORTUNITIES TO YOUTH

One of the three primary goals of the initiative was to **offer supports and opportunities to youth**. The initiative set out to accomplish that goal by 1) connecting youth to peers and adults in their communities, 2) improving their life skills, 3) helping youth develop a healthy and strong sense of self, 4) helping youth build hope for their future, 5) increasing youths' knowledge of legal rights and obligations and 6) improving education, housing and health-related outcomes by mitigating legal barriers.

This section will discuss the findings associated with these efforts by drawing upon several sources of data used for this evaluation. The first section, **Services and Efforts**, will provide some basic demographic information about the youth served within each of the initiative's programs; followed by a section on **Accomplishments** which will address the seven main outcome areas listed in the initiative's theory of change; followed by a summary of **Challenges** associated with the initiative's direct service component; and concluding with **Lessons Learned**.

Services and Efforts

Over the course of the initiative (from 2005-2011) a total of 219 unduplicated youth were directly served by the initiative. The number of youth served in each of the support programs and opportunities is shown below in Figure 5.

Figure 5 – Number of Youth Served, by Program

PROGRAM SERVICE	NUMBER OF YOUTH
Asset Coaching	111
Community Hour	13
Legal Support	93
Y-FI	61
Housing assistance	106
Total	384

Note: Some youth participated in more than one program. Therefore, the total represents duplicate counting for those youth.

More detailed information about the youth served within each program is provided next.

Asset Coaching — A total of 111 youth received asset coaching services over the life of the initiative (67 from Edgewood and 44 from StarVista). The following data, however, was collected from records kept on 36 youth served by Edgewood Center. Due to the late start of the evaluation as well as staff turnover and changes in record keeping at StarVista after asset coaching ended in 2008, data are not available on the other 75 youth.

Of the 36 youth served by Edgewood from December 2007, on average, youth were 16 years old when they joined the program, and participated in the program for six months. Youth met with their asset coach an average of 16 times during their involvement in the program. Some of the youths' objectives for participating

in asset coaching included: receive academic support while in high school (15), attend a college, university or trade school (13), obtain employment (9), participate in recreational activities or sport leagues (8) and graduate from high school (7).

It also became evident through the series of interviews and focus-group discussions that asset-coached youth assigned varying definitions to asset coaching. Some shared the view that asset coach services were available to help youth set and achieve their goals, while others described it as a service to support, guide and counsel youth and still others believed that the purpose of asset-coach services was mainly to connect youth to adults who could provide a helping hand.

While in the program, asset-coached youth also obtained referrals ranging from tutoring (4), Boys and Girls Club (3), Therapeutic Behavioral Services (3), employment (2) to nursing classes at Edgewood (2). Most youth were also accessing other services or programs, such as Independent Living Skills (6 of 16 youth), were involved in a sports league (4 of 16 youth), were part of a mentor program (3 of 16 youth) and after school program (3 of 16 youth).

Some of the reasons for dismissing youth from the program included youth graduating from the program (6), youth moving out of the county or changing placement (6) and youth not responding to the asset coach’s meeting requests (6).

Asset coaching began administering the youth survey in the Spring of 2009 and, of the 36 youth served, 22 youth completed a pre-survey. Of the 22 youth, five of them completed a pre and post-survey but one of the five sets of surveys could not be used as a pair due to the time that had elapsed between the pre/post administration (i.e., more than three months). Please see the section “Methodology” on pages 13-15 for an explanation of the factors responsible for the low number of matched surveys.

Legal Support — Ninety-three current and emancipated foster youth and kinship youth received free legal support services during the life of the initiative. Youths’ presenting needs were wide-ranging and included issues around school/educational rights, access to health benefits, dependency rights, housing and employment-related needs. The majority (over 50 percent) of support provided was around youths’ educational rights, particularly adherence to the regulations of AB 490⁵, receipt of special education services and school enrollment/placement. Between February 2006 and April 2011, the legal advocate worked on 241 issues with youth. Referrals for her services came from a variety of sources including: self-referral by youth, the housing advocate, court-appointed attorneys, social workers, CASAs, employment services staff, educational liaisons, probation officers, asset coaches and foster parents.

In addition to providing direct services, the legal advocate provided numerous trainings on legal topics relevant to the population of youth served by FTF. As seen in the figure below, a total of 492 individuals ranging from youth to school board members were trained on salient legal and educational issues faced by foster youth.

Figure 6 – Educational Presentations Provided by Legal Support

PARTICIPANTS	TOPIC OF DISCUSSION	NUMBER
Youth	School discipline, self-advocacy, educational rights, housing rights, public benefits, consumer law, other rights of emancipating youth	175

⁵ This bill establishes legislative intent that foster youth are ensured access to the same opportunities to meet academic achievement standards to which all students are held.

PARTICIPANTS	TOPIC OF DISCUSSION	NUMBER
Service providers & educators	Educational rights and advocacy	160
Community members & volunteers (CASA)	Legal issues for foster youth and transitioning foster youth	107
School board members	Foster youth education issues	50
Total participants trained:		492

Community Hour/Enrichment Activities – Throughout its brief run, community hour served 13 youth. While the youth who attended regularly enjoyed the time together and learned from the asset coach and community worker who led the sessions and from each other, recruiting was very difficult. Transportation was a challenge and youth had many conflicting activities that made regular attendance difficult.

Youth Financial Independence Program (Y-FI) – From 2007 through the end of 2010, 61 foster and kinship youth had enrolled in Y-FI. Of those 61 youth, about half of them successfully graduated from the program (37), while 13 exited before reaching their savings goal and the remaining 11 youth continued to save at the time this report was released. The most commonly reported savings goal for these youth included vehicle (14), investments (12) and post-secondary education (8).

Accomplishments

Provided in this next section are findings associated with each outcome area listed in the Logic Model (see page 12), drawing upon data sources ranging from youth surveys, staff observations, interviews and focus group discussions to anecdotal stories. The “Accomplishments” section will then be followed by a discussion around the challenges encountered while serving youth, and the lessons learned.

The Initiative Helped Youth Connect to Supportive Adults

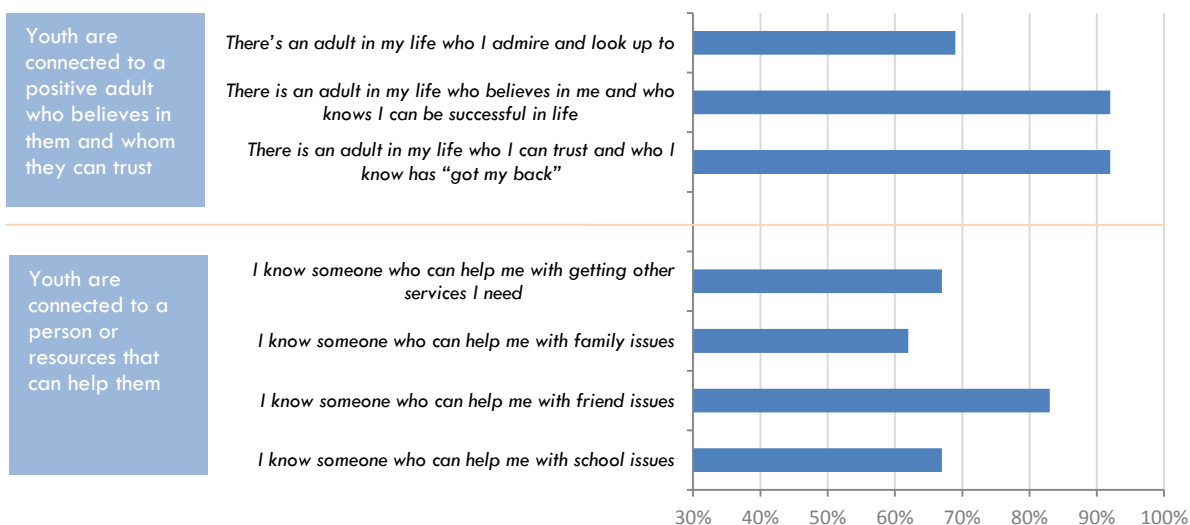
To gauge the extent to which FTF helped youth connect to supportive adults, the following data sources were used: youth surveys, staff observations and asset coaching interviews. Provided below are the findings.

As seen in the figure below, by the end of their participation in the program, the majority of youth (92%) reported being connected to a positive adult who both believed in them and had their best interests at heart. On the other hand, fewer youth reported being connected to adults who could offer help or be a resource, especially with regard to school issues (67%) and services in general (67%).

“[The asset coach helped me] by being there, having someone to talk to outside of family members and friends. We talked about things I don’t necessarily want to share with family or friends.”

- Asset Coach Youth

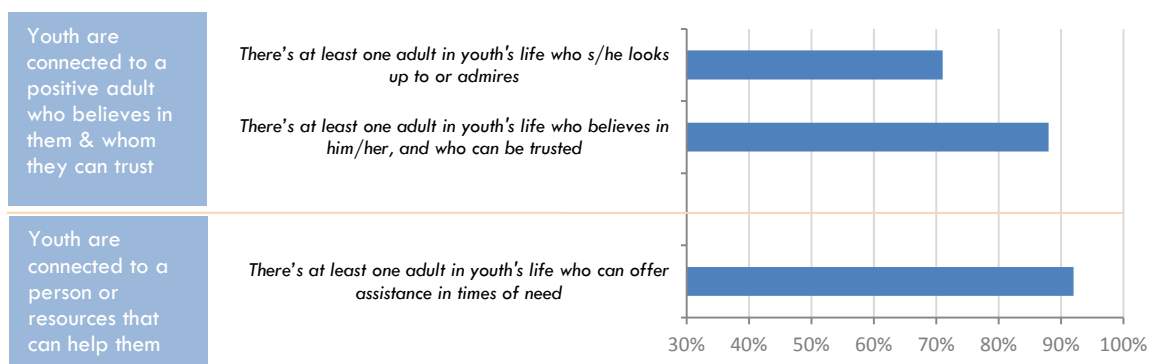
Figure 7 — Youths’ Perceptions about Their *Connections to Supportive Adults* (post-test)



Note: Data based on responses provided by 13 youth (nine from asset coaching, three from community hour and one from legal support).The percentages are based on the number of youth who responded "very much true."

Youths’ perceptions were corroborated by staff observations, as seen in the figure below. Specifically, while staff members reported that the majority of youth were connected to positive adults by the time they left the program, they believed that only 71% of youth had an adult in their lives whom they looked up to.

Figure 8 — Staff Observations about Youths’ *Connections to Supportive Adults* (post-test)



Note: Data based on staff members’ observations of 24 youth (21 from asset coaching and three from community hour).The percentages are based on the number of staff evaluations of youth with responses of "very much true."

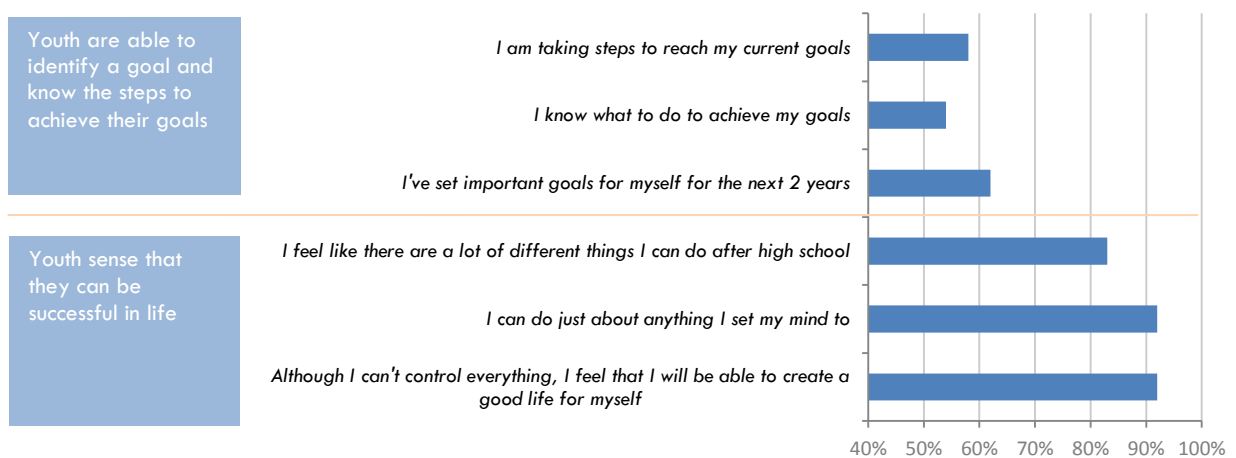
While the initiative intended to connect youth to adults within their own circles or communities, it became evident from the researchers’ discussions with asset-coached youth and their caregivers (in the triangulated case study) that they relied principally on the asset coach for support. These youth had built a strong rapport with the asset coach, and most importantly, trusted him. As one youth said during the interview, *"We laughed and joked about things, but then [turned our attention] to serious things...I knew I could always trust him."* The sense of connectedness was also felt beyond the youth-asset coach relationship; a caregiver shared that the asset coach *"was my eyes and legs."*

The Initiative Helped Youth Plan for the Future

To gauge the extent to which the initiative helped youth plan for the future, the following data sources were used: youth surveys, staff observations, asset-coaching interviews, asset-coaching focus group and key informant interviews. Provided below are the findings.

Upon exiting the program, the great majority of youth believed that they could be successful in life, but fewer of them reported having a goal and/or taking steps towards achieving their goals. As seen in the figure below, youth had a positive outlook on their future (92%), in that they felt they had prospects after high school (83%) and could achieve things in life as long as they set their minds to it (92%). However, only 62% of the youth had set goals for the next two years, and a little over half of them knew the steps to take to achieve their goals (58%).

Figure 9 – Youths’ Perceptions about Their Abilities to *Plan for the Future* (post-test)



Note: Data based on responses provided by 13 youth (nine from asset coaching, three from community hour and one from legal support). The percentages are based on the number of youth who responded “very much true.”

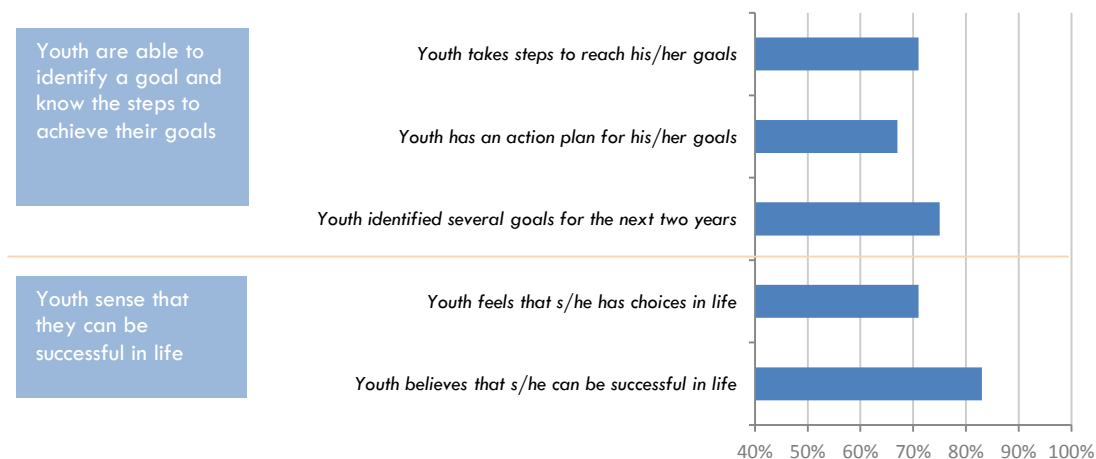
Similar levels of optimism were heard from asset-coached youth who were either interviewed or who had participated in a focus-group discussion. All nine youth who were interviewed **had future plans**, such as going to college, and some of them were considering possible career paths such as police officer, art therapist, game programmer and professional athlete. When asked how asset coaching had helped them over the course of their journey, three of the nine interviewed youth mentioned that the program had **helped them stay focused on their goals**, and four of the five youth who participated in a focus group discussion said that the program had **helped them feel more positive about their future**. Moreover, youth and caregivers appreciated the asset coach’s position on holding youth accountable for their decisions. For example, if a youth had identified his future goal as improving his grade in math but had not made any effort to follow through on the tutoring referral provided by the asset coach, the asset coach would immediately address that lapse in responsibility. As one caregiver said during an interview, “[The Asset Coach] held the kids accountable and put the responsibilities on the family, exactly where it should be.”

Of the youth who participated in a focus group discussion (n=5), the majority of them **reported changes in their abilities to plan for the future**. Specifically, they saw themselves attending college, trade school or being professionally involved, and they took steps to pursue their goals, such as by improving their grades. Four of the five youth said that the program had helped them **feel more positive about their future**. Youth

also reported having **received help to set their goals** and said the asset coach gave them some tools to achieve their goals by connecting them to professionals.

The ratings provided by the initiative’s staff were for the most part similar to those provided by the youth, in particular with regard to youths’ beliefs about their potential for success in life. The one area, however, where staff and youth differed in opinion relates to goal planning. Specifically, staff members were more likely to believe that youth had goals for the near future and were taking steps to reach their goals (i.e., 67%-75%, as compared to 50%-60%, respectively).

Figure 10 – Staff Observations about Youths’ Abilities to *Plan for the Future* (post-test)



Note: Data based on staff members’ observations of 24 youth (21 from asset coaching, three from community hour). The percentages are based on the number of staff evaluations of youth with responses of “very much true.”

An additional opportunity to plan for their future came as a result of the expansion of the Independent Living Program (ILP) to include kinship care youth. The program had been available only to court-dependent youth living in out-of-home placement or in detention. The addition of youth living with their relatives and not being in the child welfare system was a big step toward providing these young people with additional skills for independent living. With funds and advocacy from the initiative, ILP started a second session at Canada College which allowed youth a chance to choose between going to College of San Mateo or Canada for the classes. ILP has continued to be offered to kinship youth even after the funding stopped.

The Initiative Helped Youth Learn about Themselves

To gauge the extent to which the initiative helped youth learn about themselves, the following data sources were used: youth surveys, staff observations, asset coaching interviews and asset coaching focus group. Provided below are the findings.

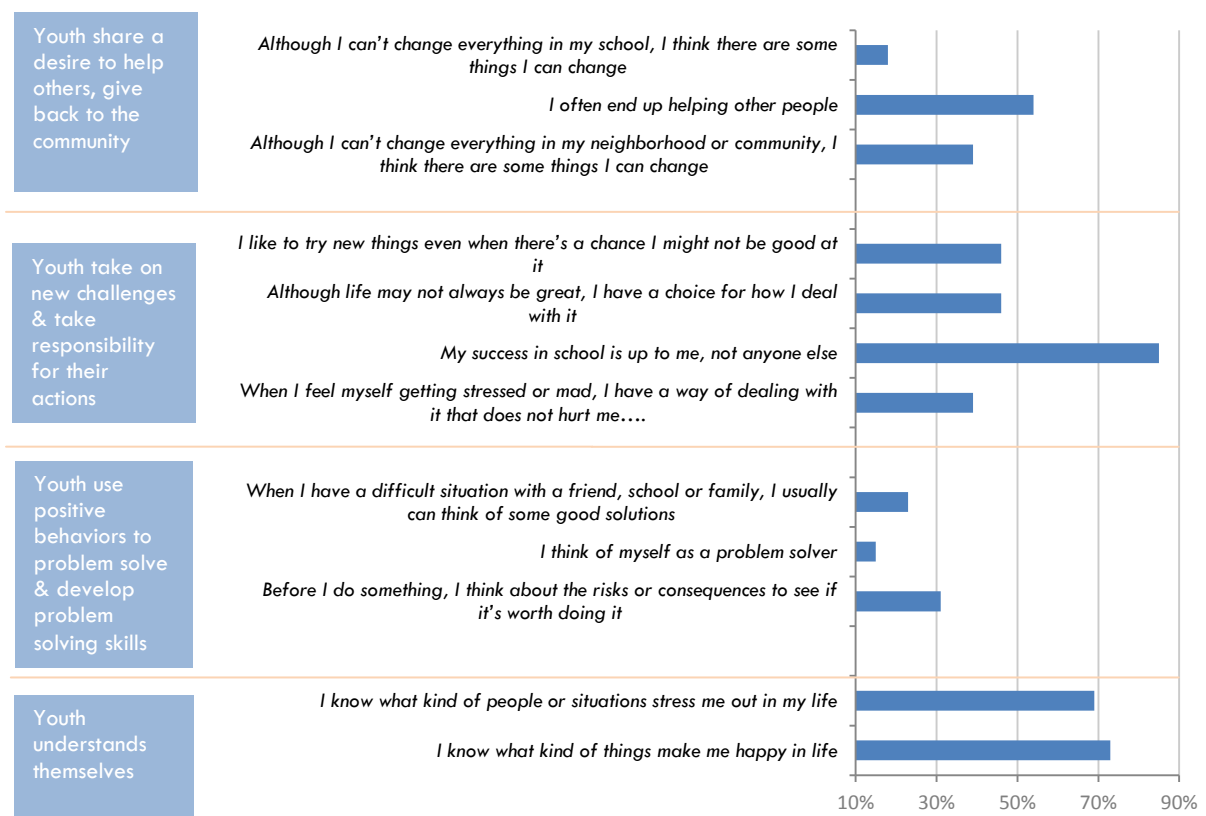
By the end of their participation in the program, youth felt that they had a good understanding of themselves, in terms of their likes and dislikes, but fewer youth reported acquiring problem-solving skills or a desire to take on new challenges or having a desire to help others and give back to their communities. As seen in the figure below, close to 70% of youth felt that they knew what types of situations or people typically caused them stress, and were also aware of what things/events made them happy. On the other hand, very few youth saw themselves as problem solvers

“I am a much better person because I was part of the program.”
 - Asset Coach Youth

(15%) or as being agents for change in both their schools (18%) and communities (39%). With regard to this last finding (not seeing themselves as having the ability to effect change), it may be a reflection of the low number of community-hour youth in the youth-survey sample, given that youths’ desire to help others and give back to their community was felt strongly during the focus group discussion with community-hour youth.

When community-hour youth were asked to share how the program had inspired them, one youth said that she would like to “give back to the community by [opening] a center for youth to keep them off the streets.” Another youth said that she would like to focus on “community building by opening a center for foster and troubled youth.” Another youth said that she wants to “bring kids together to be leaders.” On a related note, this last youth took it upon herself to share her concerns about youth crime in her community with her city’s mayor.

Figure 11 – Youths’ Perceptions about Their Sense of Self – *Learned About Themselves* (post-test)



Note: Data based on responses provided by 13 youth (nine from asset coaching, three from community hour, one from legal support). The percentages are based on the number of youth who responded “very much true.”

Youths’ abilities to learn about themselves while engaged in the program were also made evident during a focus group discussion. One of the five youth discovered his ability to focus on details while ice-skating for the first time, while other youth became aware of their abilities to do anything as long as they “put their minds to it.” Finally, one youth said that he had learned about the importance of “treating others with respect.”

When comparing youths’ reports to staff members’ observations, both similarities and dissimilarities come to light. For example, staff felt that youth were better equipped to handle stress or conflicts in their lives in a

peaceful manner, consider the consequences of their actions (more impulse control) and problem solve upon exiting the program. Youth, however, did not share that view. Staff also reported that over half of the youth showed a willingness to take on new challenges and take responsibility for their actions, while fewer youth felt that way. On the other hand, staff’s ratings of youth self-awareness (e.g., what makes them happy in life and what situations cause stress) was comparable to those provided by youth.

Figure 12 – Staff Observations about Youths’ Sense of Self - *Learned About Themselves* (post-test)



Note: Data based on staff members’ observations of 24 youth (21 from asset coaching, three from community hour). The percentages are based on the number of staff evaluations of youth with responses of “very much true.”

The Initiative Helped Youth Strengthen Their Social Relationships

To gauge the extent to which the initiative helped youth strengthen their social relationships, the following data sources were used: youth surveys, staff observations, asset-coaching success stories and community-hour focus group. Provided below are the findings.

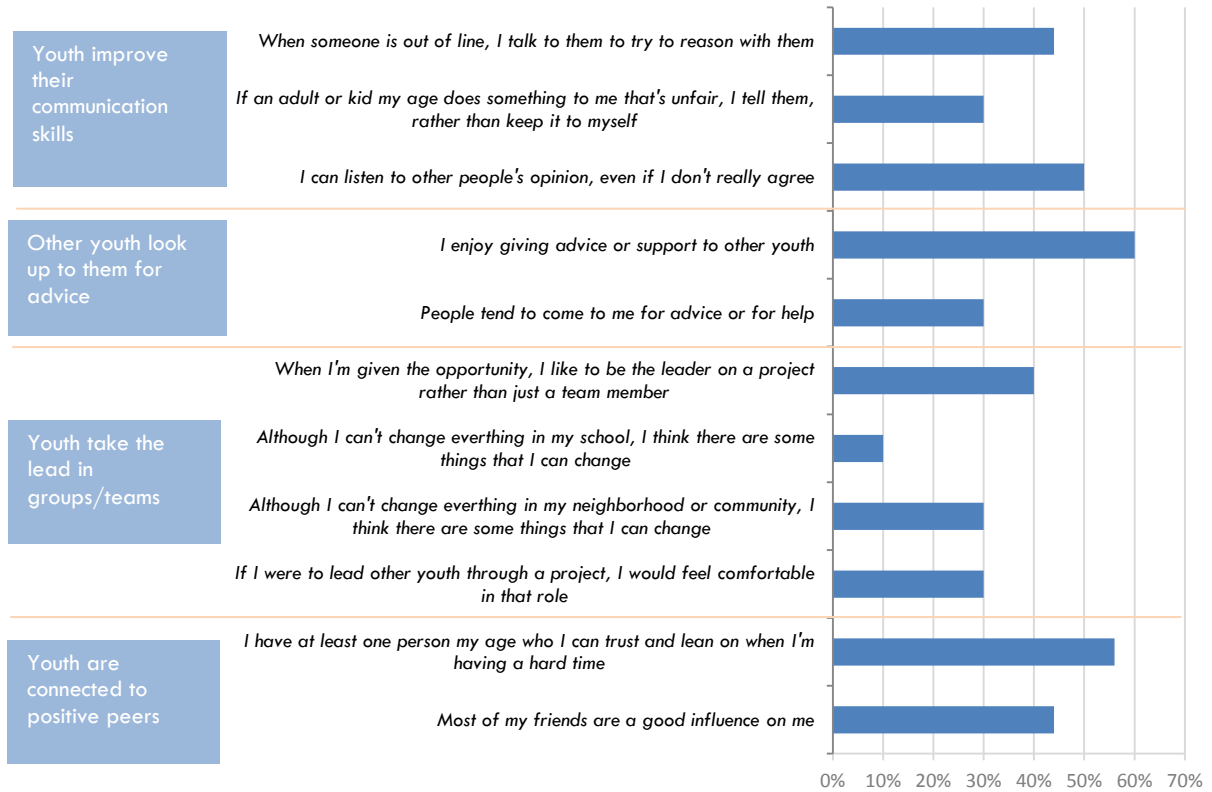
By the time they exited the program, about half of the youth said they had developed communication skills, such as accepting other people’s opinions even if they disagree (50%) and reasoning with people who they feel may be “out of line” (44%). Further, over half of the youth also reported having a peer in their lives whom they could count on in hard times (56%). However, fewer youth (less than 50%) felt strongly about their leadership skills. While more youth reported

“I feel more comfortable being open [i.e., talking] with my family.”

- Asset Coach Youth

having the power to effect change in their community or neighborhood (30%), 10% of them felt the same way about their school.

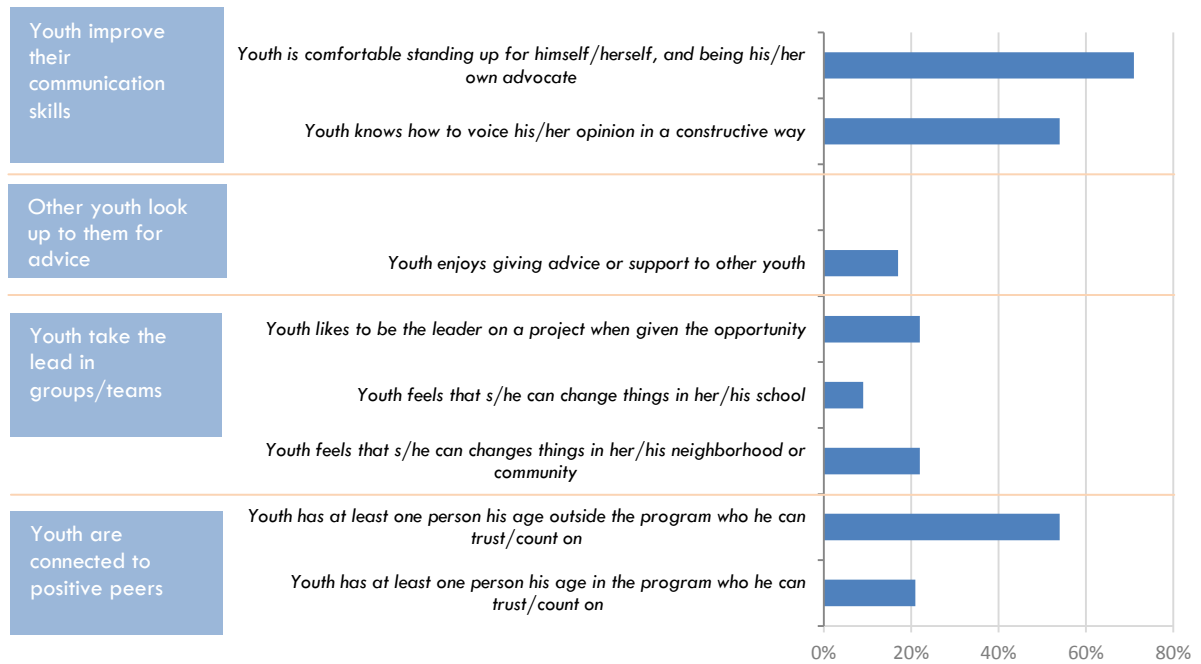
Figure 13 – Youths’ Perceptions about Their *Social Relationships* (post-test)



Note: Data based on responses provided by 13 youth (nine from asset coaching, three from community hour, one from legal support). The percentages are based on the number of youth who responded “very much true.”

Youths’ perceptions about their social relationships were supported for the most part by staff members’ observations. As seen in the figure below, staff felt that over half of the youth (54%) could communicate their feelings and opinions constructively by the end of the program, and were also connected to positive peers outside of the program (54%). The one area where the two sources differed in opinion revolved around leadership skills, where staff members believed that few youth (around 20%) were willing to take on the lead in group settings, as compared to Youths’ self-reports (around 30%-40%).

Figure 14 – Staff Observations about Youths’ *Social Relationships* (post-test)



Note: Data based on staff members’ observations of 24 youth (21 from asset coaching and three from community hour).The percentages are based on the number of staff evaluations of youth with responses of “very much true.”

In addition to making staff observations, the asset coach also summarized several success stories, from which common themes were analyzed. One of the common themes identified relates to youths’ communication skills, a dimension included in the ‘social relationships’ domain. With the help of their asset coach, youth had improved their communication skills and were better prepared to advocate for themselves as a result. The asset coach cited specific examples to illustrate the tangible changes in youths’ abilities; provided below is one of them.

“In this case, the caregiver was considering sending the youth back to Detroit to live with her. The asset coach helped the youth voice her opinion about her caretaker’s decision and both the youth and the caretaker ultimately managed to have a constructive conversation about the youth’s future plans.”

Caregivers were also appreciative of the help afforded by the asset coach in aiding the communication process between themselves and their youth. While not specifically stated as such, the communication breakdown may have resulted from the caregivers’ resistance toward accepting differences of opinions, coupled with youths’ resistance toward parental directives. As one caregiver said *“[The asset coach] facilitates parent-youth communication by taking the pressure off.”* Caregivers felt that the asset coach was not only able to relate to their youth but also spoke the same language.

The Initiative Helped Youth Address Legal Barriers

To gauge the extent to which the initiative helped youth address legal barriers, the following data sources were used: legal support’s training evaluation forms, case statistics on legal services and success stories.

Throughout the life of the initiative, the legal advocate provided a total of 12 trainings to professionals from the educational, legal and social welfare fields, as well as 12 trainings to foster and kinship youth. One of the last training sessions took place shortly before the end of the initiative, and was given to a group of sophomore and junior students. The training was designed to help students in Independent Living Program classes learn more about their educational rights and ultimately become better self-advocates.

Based on the evaluation forms completed by 18 students, the great majority of them rated the following aspects of the class very favorably: they found the class interesting and they learned a lot and found the information to be very useful. As the youth noted themselves, they came out of the class with improved knowledge around their educational rights. Specifically, youth commented that they learned about:

- The difference between special education and Section 504 plans;
- The types of services that fall under an Individualized Education Plan; and
- The types of protections afforded to foster youth.

The legal advocate maintained statistics on services provided on behalf of FTF youth and the issues addressed. The largest proportion (54%) of the 241 issues addressed by the legal advocate was focused on educational rights and access to educational services. A significant amount of her time was devoted to education advocacy aimed at helping youth obtain appropriate services related to their disabilities. Difficulties around school placement and transferring records and credits, an issue very common to foster youth when they change home placements, were also a major focus. She also spent considerable time addressing issues around dependency rights and access to public benefits, such as MediCal.

Figure 15 – Issues Addressed by Legal Advocate

ISSUE AREA	ISSUE TOPICS	NUMBER	PERCENT
Education	Special education	38	15%
	Enrollment/transfer/credits/diploma/placement	36	15%
	Educational rights, services	28	12%
	School discipline, expulsion	28	12%
	Total Education	<u>130</u>	<u>54%</u>
Welfare status	Dependency rights, emancipation, family	23	9%
Benefits	Kin GAP, SSI/SSDI, Child Support, other	21	9%
Medical	Medi-Cal, dental, mental health, records	19	8%
Other	Housing	10	4%
	Financial: taxes, contracts, trusts	7	3%
	Employment	5	2%
	Immigration	5	2%
	Criminal law, consumer rights, name change, other	21	9%
Total Other	38	20%	
Total Issues		241	100%

The legal advocate wrote up brief stories of notable completed cases throughout the initiative. A content analysis of over 60 of these cases highlighted two areas of major concern for the foster and kinship youth served: infringement on their educational rights and questioned eligibility for medical coverage. Provided below are selected excerpts that bring to light important nuances in youths' situational circumstances.

“Along with pro bono co-counsel, the legal advocate successfully represented a foster youth and his educational rights-holders in a six-day state-level administrative special education hearing. They prevented his school district's attempt to force him into a very restrictive, inappropriate educational setting and obtained, among other remedies, over 450 hours of one-to-one instructional services to make up for the school district's violations of his rights as a student with disabilities over the course of years. The services ordered by the administrative law judge are crucial to enable the youth to learn skills that are essential for his educational success and for his ability to live independently after he graduates from high school.”

“The legal advocate successfully negotiated with a school district to drop its expulsion proceedings against a foster youth who did not qualify for special education but whose behavioral difficulties in school clearly were related to multiple removals from her biological home and other issues in her dependency case.”

“The legal advocate negotiated with a school district to help a youth avoid an expulsion hearing on allegations that he possessed and used marijuana on a school campus. The youth was in a restrictive special education placement because of his significant learning and emotional disabilities, and he really struggled to be successful in school. His biggest fear was being moved from the only classroom where he felt like the teacher was effective and cared about his progress. By agreeing to a settlement, the youth avoided the risk of having his educational placement changed.”

Uncertainty around medical coverage eligibility was another commonly reported theme in the legal advocate's anecdotal stories. Provided below is one such story.

“The legal advocate represented a former foster youth in a Medi-Cal action with the county. The youth's work income was inconsistent due to severe physical disabilities that sometimes left her hospitalized or unable to work for weeks or months at a time. However, her Medi-Cal share of cost (how much of her own medical bills she had to pay before Medi-Cal kicked in each month) had been calculated based on a period when her earnings were much higher than usual; she not only had been working consistently during that time but also had managed to earn substantial overtime pay by covering other workers' shifts. She literally could not afford the high share of cost while working intermittently and trying to pursue higher education. The exorbitant price of the prescription medications she had to take daily to maintain her health guaranteed huge monthly out-of-pocket costs that were beyond her means. The legal advocate provided supplemental income information to the Medi-Cal worker, which gave a true picture of the youth's typical monthly earnings. The advocate successfully negotiated with the county to reduce the youth's share of cost to zero.”

The Initiative Helped Youth Gain Financial Skills

The Y-FI youth survey was the data source used to gauge the extent to which the initiative helped youth acquire financial skills.

Of the 13 youth who completed a Y-FI survey, nine of them had already graduated from Y-FI and the remaining four youth were still active at that time.

Upon starting the program, youth reported already having basic financial knowledge. Specifically, all youth had opened a checking account; most of them had a savings account (11 of 13 youth) and saved money (10 of 13 youth); and over half of them kept track of expenses (9 of 13 youth) and had created a budget (8 of 13 youth). This may be due to the majority (83%) having reported that they were participating or had participated in the county's independent living program. While participating in the Y-FI program, over half of

the youth reported having learned “a lot” about the *reasons to save money* (69%), the *difference between needs and wants* (58%) and *how to save money* (55%).

Figure 16 – Youths’ Reports on Financial Literacy

	YOUTH WHO SAID “ I LEARNED A LOT”
Reasons why someone might want to save money.	69%
The difference between needs and wants.	58%
How to save money.	55%
How to balance a checking account.	54%
The difference between a checking account and a savings account.	50%
The difference between a bank and a check cashing business.	33%
How to create a budget.	31%

Note: Data based on responses provided by 13 Y-FI youth.

As part of their program participation, youth were asked to identify an asset goal for which they wanted to start saving. The most commonly reported asset goals were to buy a car (4) and to pay for school expenses (4). Almost all of the youth reported successfully reaching their goals by the end of their participation in Y-FI (7 of 8 youth). Youths’ financial achievements were, however, met with challenges on the way such as unemployment, credit card debt, increased rent and parenthood.

In addition to these challenges, Y-FI graduates also reported experiencing the following challenges after they left the program: credit problems due to too much debt (75%; n=8), not having enough money to meet their needs (71%; n=7), not having enough money for their wants (71%; n=8) and having paid for something with insufficient funds in their accounts (57%; n=8). On the positive side, 63% (n=8) of graduate Y-FI youth confirmed that they were still saving money.

When asked what Y-FI had taught them about saving, youth said the following:

- “[Saving] pays off in the long run.”
- “To put a portion aside every check and pretend that it's not there.”
- “Setting priorities and thinking about the [ways you may need money] such as for emergencies.”
- “Building persistence, and keeping on at it until I was finally able to depend on myself rather than others.”
- “That having a plan is good.”
- “Savings has great benefits.”

In addition to acquiring financial skills, 37 Y-FI youth successfully saved and invested money during their participation in the program. Eleven others were still saving at the time this report was released and the remaining 13 saved some money, but had to leave the program prior to attaining their asset goal. The successful savers typically made monthly deposits of \$48.12 over the course of their savings period. Collectively, the 61 youth saved and invested \$94,820, including \$4,534 in personal savings, \$8,826 in earned match funds, \$78,369 in matched withdrawals and \$3,091 in withdrawals of participants who had closed their accounts.

The Initiative Helped Youth Learn Job Skills

Developing an understanding of career options, and, in some cases, actually obtaining employment were also listed as reasons for joining asset coaching. The asset coach provided help ranging from resume building and job hunting to giving youth an opportunity to shadow professionals.

The Initiative Helped Youth Access Services

Helping youth succeed academically – Research has shown that academic outcomes are poor for foster care youth placed under custody of the courts.⁶ To better understand the educational experiences of dependent youth in San Mateo County, members of the EdSuccess Partnership - founded by CASA of San Mateo County and FTF - commissioned researchers from the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University and SPHERE Institute to examine the relationship between educational outcomes and dependency experiences. They linked data from Child Welfare Services and four partnering educational institutions for youth enrolled between the 2003-04 and 2007-08 school years. Overall, dependent youth had substantially worse educational outcomes when compared with nondependent youth: they had lower California Standards Test (CST) proficiency rates; higher absence, mobility and grade retention rates; lower high school exit exam passing rates and credits accumulated and higher discipline referral rates.⁷

Thus it is no surprise that the academic support provided by the asset coach was appreciated by youth and caregivers alike. Whether the youth needed support to graduate from high school, enroll in college or request an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the asset coach was there to help. Provided below is an example illustrating how the asset coach helped a family work through some special education restrictions.

A developmentally disabled youth had been assigned a specific high school upon completing his Individualized Education Program. The asset coach visited the high school with the youth to see if it would be an appropriate fit, which it was not (the youth became overwhelmed while visiting a classroom). A few days later, the asset coach visited a specialized school with the youth (a school serving youth with emotional and/or developmental disabilities), and the youth felt quite content in that environment. Without the asset coach as his advocate, this youth would have been placed in a less than desirable school.

The educational advocacy work of the legal advocate also helped youth achieve academically by securing needed services for learning needs and disabilities and maintaining stability of educational setting.

Connecting emancipating youth to housing services – One of the most frightening aspects of emancipation from the foster care system is the looming possibility of homelessness. The initiative's housing advocate assisted youth in locating housing. She created a curriculum to prepare youth for living on their own. She also educated landlords as to the needs of youth with the goal of securing a housing spot when a vacancy occurred. The initiative's housing advocate was funded as part of a multi-county effort, the Foster Youth Housing Initiative (FYHI), whose goal was to prove that stable housing could be the cornerstone of success for emancipated youth. The evaluation of the FYHI initiative found that the program resulted in greater housing stability for "average" foster care youth. Furthermore, participants had improved their educational attainments and school enrollment as well as had increased their hours at work (leading to a rise in income), and access to health care services.⁸

⁶ Trout, A. L., Hagaman, J., Casey, K., Reid, R., & Epstein, M. H. (2008). The academic status of children and youth in out-of-home care: A review of the literature. *Children and Youth Services Review*.

⁷ Castrechini, S. (2009). Issue Brief: *Educational Outcomes for Court-Dependent Youth in San Mateo County*. John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities. http://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/docs/YDA_Foster_Yth_IssueBrief_091130.pdf

⁸ LaFrance Associates, LLC (2008). Foster Youth Housing initiative: Final Evaluation Findings.

Providing mini grants – Working with their asset coach, youth applied for grants of up to \$500 to help them reach their asset goal. A total of 21 youth received \$10,500 in grants and additional support was provided for the mural arts project and a ropes course. Ten of the grants were disbursed to youth who attended a Black College tour, while the remaining grants were used for things such as purchasing a laptop, attending a camp, taking a trip or taking lessons.

Challenges

Though many successes were realized through the implementation of activities to reach this goal of offering supports and services to youth, the initiative also experienced challenges.

Needs of the target population – Fostering the Future was initially envisioned as only serving youth in the foster care system. However, when it became clear that there were not enough youth to justify the program, the criteria for inclusion expanded to youth in kinship care. While the reasoning that outcomes were similar for these two groups was sound, what was not anticipated was the extent of the difference of circumstances and their implications. All stakeholders interviewed commented on how different in fact these groups were to serve. For instance, foster youth have access to financial resources not available to kinship youth, and also have a larger professional support system working with them. As a result, foster youth may not have as much time or interest for additional support initially. On the other hand, kinship youth do not face the same frightening abruptness in support as do foster youth upon emancipation and thus may not feel as motivated to plan and achieve self-sufficiency by age 18.

Staff turnover at partner agencies – Instability in staffing presented significant problems. Five of the original program dreamers at three partner agencies had left their positions by early 2007. Several of them had held the youth development vision at their agencies. Their exit created a philosophical void that was never really filled. Four asset coaches had resigned by spring of 2007. This raised red flags and caused the management to stop and examine the programming to make improvements. With the departure of the asset coaches, youth as well as social workers lost trust in the program as relationships were broken and new ones were slow to be established. This resulted in some disconnection and dropout of youth and fewer referrals from San Mateo County’s Human Service Agency (HSA). Because of the recession and economic pressure at HSA, responsibility for managing Y-FI shifted from HSA to StarVista where the linkages to the youth in the program were not as strong as they had been at HSA. This caused a loss of momentum that was exacerbated by additional staff turnover at StarVista.

Lack of youth buy-in – While youth participation in the programs offered by the initiative was voluntary, the youth usually heard about and enrolled in the program as a result of a referral by an adult. This may have contributed to the lack of youth buy-in, particularly to the asset coaching element. These youth were, for the most part, referred to an asset coach by their caregiver or social worker who felt that they could benefit from this level of service. However, as the asset coach later explained, one of the factors that influences whether a youth will successfully complete the program (i.e., reach his/her goals) is goal ownership. Similarly, the feeling was that if joining the program had been initiated by the youth then they would have more buy-in. Attempts were made to go directly to students through the schools. However, due to issues of confidentiality and the small number of foster and kinship youth in each school, this strategy was not successful.

“Some of the characteristics of youth who completed the Asset Coach program included persistence, dedication, willingness to follow through and the goals were near and dear to the youth’s heart...”

- Asset Coach

Circumstances – The circumstances surrounding families’ living situations also played a role in the outcome of each case. Families (youth and caregivers) tended to be more responsive and attentive to the asset coach’s services when they were facing a crisis of some sort (i.e., risk of expulsion, arrest, communication breakdown,

etc.). Being in crisis mode put pressure on the asset coaches to solve problems that may have been outside their ability to manage, and may have pushed the expedient rather than most effective solution.

Lessons Learned

Based both on the accomplishments and challenges of providing services to foster and kinship youth, the following lessons learned from this work can offer guidance to future similar efforts.

Clarification of the asset coach role – This was a new service concept piloted by the initiative. All partners agreed that foster youth could use someone to work with them on asset issues as differentiated from case management and crisis needs. However, as the program developed, asset coaches began to take on more of a case management role. Some of these youth had wide-ranging needs and asset coaches were easily pulled away from their original charge to instead meet only those needs that were immediate in nature.

In addition, the organizational philosophies of the two provider agencies were different and basic understanding of youth development was not shared between StarVista and Edgewood. Toward the second half of the initiative, additional training in youth development was provided to line staff and management, but the differences had already been solidified. As a result of these differences between the two agencies, individual asset-coach philosophies varied as well. Some of them stressed enabling the youth to take charge and others were more focused on problem solving for the youth. In combination, this was very stressful for the asset coaches given the pressure to work together as a team and likely contributed to the high rate of turnover. Creating standards of practice and guidelines along with greater clarity during hiring may have helped with fulfillment of the asset coach role. We must also recognize that the team was building the airplane while flying it. With the experience gained during this pilot, future efforts should focus on clearly defining the original model and working to maintain that vision.

Defining eligibility criteria for participation – Through experience, the initiative learned that there is an optimal set of circumstances that will enable youth to take advantage of the various programs. The youth with the highest needs, for example, were not the ideal candidates for asset coaching. Youth without earned income were not likely to succeed in the Y-FI program. But in the interests of getting the enrollment numbers high at the beginning of the program, recruiters may have cast too wide a net and included youth who were not well positioned to take full advantage of the programs offered. Additionally, staff hired for the envisioned role did not have the preparation and skill set to work with the more challenging group of youth who walked in the door.

Concluding Thoughts

Fostering the Future provided many tangible benefits to more than 200 foster and kinship youth who participated in the initiative. In many ways, this was a truly innovative effort. The concept of supporting foster and kinship youth in achieving self-defined goals apart from concrete job skills and educational advancement (and without strict adherence to the Search Institute's 40 developmental assets structure) as a way to prepare these youth for the challenges of adulthood is fairly unique. With any innovation, there are stumbling blocks that, in turn, present opportunities for learning. Ways of approaching program planning, partner development, staff training and identification of eligibility criteria were identified.

Central to the FTF direct services model was the relationship between the adults and the youth. Functioning essentially as trained life coaches, the asset coaches provided support, direction and emotional guidance for youth who may have had several adults playing various roles in their lives but none whose primary focus was on the youths' own goals and dreams. Many of them were hungry for just this sort of relationship and several

commented during a focus group that the asset coach provided both encouragement and support in helping them establish goals, articulate needs and become their own best advocate.

Before asset coaching was available, foster youth certainly had access to social workers who focused on where they were living, on their overall safety, while in the foster care system. There were educational liaisons who helped with some school matters such as school placement and transferring of school records and therapists who dealt with mental health issues. Kinship families had case managers but they were focused on supporting the adults in the families.

This new service, however, meant that there was a specific person available whose job it was to focus on the intangibles of the future, the aspirations, dreams and goals that help youth understand themselves, their communities and the linkages between the two; the dreams that give rise to a hope and sense of possibility, both of which are often missing from the lives of youth who have been abused and/or neglected. The legal advocate also was responding to the particular needs of each young person she served, representing them and their rights in the school system, medical system or other environments where individual voices may not readily be heard.

In the long run, however, providing this service in this way proved not to be cost effective, particularly in a struggling economy. Some of the youth-focused and youth-driven principles, however, have been absorbed in the day-to-day operations of the kinship case managers and in the approach to transitional conferences, education and workforce development as administered through HSA.

GOAL 2: CATALYZE LOCAL SYSTEMS CHANGE

The second goal of Fostering the Future was to **catalyze local system change**, as measured by new, improved ways of doing business that deliver improved outcomes for youth. This systemic change was to include new ways of collecting and analyzing data, new forms of cooperation and communication and new alignment of resources that encourage breakthrough strategies. Presented in this section are the findings associated with this goal.

The “system” that provides care to foster children is not a single system - in fact, it requires multiple systems of care to meet the needs of children who are out-placed from their parents. The multiple systems of care include child welfare, education, justice, health, employment and housing. All of these systems must function optimally to meet the needs of average citizens, but when a child who no longer has a parent as an advocate or guide must navigate these multiple arenas alone, it is easy for this individual to become lost or fall through the cracks.

Consequently, one of the initiative’s primary goals was to “catalyze” local system change. This goal, cross-cutting disparate and polyvalent systems of care, was extremely ambitious. The initiative did not attempt to change the entire system that supports children in foster care and in kinship care. Instead, it attempted to change the foster care system primarily in two areas: moving the system toward a more inclusive youth-centered, youth-development orientation; and making stronger linkages among the varying systems to reinforce their combined effectiveness.

Accomplishments

The initiative worked with local, regional and state collaborators to effect changes to several aspects of the system of foster care in San Mateo County. The accomplishments, large and small, are based on actual strategic outcomes, as well as the perceptions of change experienced by stakeholders, partners and program participants.

The Initiative Brought a Youth Development Perspective to the System

When the initiative was launched in 2005, the child welfare system was focused on safety, protecting the children by assuring they had a safe placement. Independent living skills were taught through a formal program in a didactic classroom fashion, but the life goals of the youth were less of a focal point of the adults providing services. There were education and employment specialists who worked with the youth to help identify their needs in those arenas, but they rarely, if ever, sought to learn about the personal interests and aspirations of the youth. Throughout the lifetime of the initiative, the concepts of youth development began to seep into the culture of supporting governmental agencies. When Y-FI was being created, recently emancipated youth were brought onto the development team to help frame the program. The Youth Consulting Council provided input to adults about ways to improve the system. Whenever possible, the FTF team sought the youth voice internally and promoted each use externally.

The Initiative Developed Linkages Among and Between Components

In developing and strengthening the connections between existing programs that operate within the foster care system in San Mateo County, FTF sought to improve relationships between these programs and develop a foster care system that is consequently stronger and better functioning than the one that existed previously.

Legal advocacy in the schools – Through the work of the FTF legal advocate, and in partnership with CASA of San Mateo (formerly Advocates for Children), the courts and HSA now have a fuller understanding of foster youth educational rights and the policies that require consideration of education/school placement, in addition to shelter and safety, when determining location and timing of placement. For example, they will not make a placement change just before the end of a school term which results in youth losing academic credits. Some school administrators are beginning to think twice before expelling a foster youth, knowing that the legal advocate may step forward to protect the rights of that youth and beginning to realize that special circumstances may be the cause for unacceptable behavior and may be addressed by a means other than expulsion.

Support for academic achievement – The community foundation and CASA of San Mateo County established the EdSuccess Partnership in 2008. Composed of top level leaders from various public and private sectors including but not limited to the county office of education, juvenile probation, HSA child and family services, juvenile court judges and community colleges, the group was formed to look at improving educational outcomes for foster youth. Two working groups were formed out of this umbrella team: the EdData Working Group and the EdSupport Working Group. The first team worked with SPHERE Institute and the Youth Data Archive of the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University to collect data to show if there was a disparity between children who had had contact with the child welfare system and those who had not and, if so, the magnitude of the difference. They compiled school district data from four school districts and linked it to data from HSA for children and youth enrolled between the 2003-2004 and 2007-2008 school years. The Youth Data Archive staff reported back in May 2009, showing that, overall, dependent children and youth had substantially worse educational outcomes when compared with non-dependent youth: they had lower California Standards Test (CST) proficiency rates; higher absence, mobility and grade retention rates; lower rates of passing high school exit exam and lower credits accumulated and higher discipline referral rates.⁹

The EdSupport Working Group also grew from the partnership to formulate responses to the perceived disparities and then later to the data itself. The group consists of line and supervisory staff from a number of governmental and nonprofit agencies and community colleges. They first assembled in Sacramento in the spring of 2009 at the California Foster Youth Educational Summit and have been meeting ever since then. They have created an online educational handbook for youth and caregivers, started a pilot project with the South San Francisco Unified School District to provide educational conferences on a regular basis to foster youth, taken on the role of advisory group to the San Mateo County Office of Education's Foster Youth Services team and helped members of local school boards learn about the challenges facing foster youth through the Night for Abigail series.

Improvements to employment and career preparation – For several years members of FTF worked with the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) and Child and Family Services (AKA child welfare) at HSA to broker stronger working relationships between the two teams in order to improve employment options for foster youth. HSA created an effective summer employment program for emancipated youth that received two years (2010 and 2011) of funding from the WIB. Continuation is contingent upon finances and leadership.

Trained school officials, service providers and youth on the rights of foster youth – Over the course of the initiative, the legal advocate provided a total of 12 trainings to professionals from the educational, legal and social welfare fields, as well as 12 trainings to foster and kinship youth. By the end of the initiative, over 400 individuals had learned about foster youths' legal and educational rights. According to the feedback gathered from 37 service providers in one of the trainings, 89% of them reported learning a lot (i.e., selected the top two highest ratings) from the content of the training (e.g., Section 504 Plan, Individualized Education

⁹Castrechini, S. (2009). Issue Brief: *Educational Outcomes for Court-Dependent Youth in San Mateo County*. John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities. http://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/docs/YDA_Foster_Yth_IssueBrief_091130.pdf

Program, special education procedural rights and due process rights for suspensions and expulsions), and 86% found the information to be very useful.

Supported statewide advocacy – The initiative provided initial financial support for the San Mateo chapter of the California Youth Connection (e.g., website, conference calls, food for in-person meetings, travel, lodging, conference fees and web seminar) and helped volunteers raise money from other funders in subsequent years.

It also supported the concentrated efforts by the John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes to both maintain current levels of funding for transitional housing services for emancipated youth and to secure passage of the California Fostering Connections Act, AB 12, to extend voluntary foster care benefits to youth until age 21.

Challenges

Central to the initiative was the need to engage multiple components of the foster care system in San Mateo County in order to make effective changes in policies. The challenges to meeting this need were significant. Based on conversations with stakeholders, the following challenges were highlighted.

Limited knowledge of the child welfare system – There was not enough understanding within the initiative regarding the complexities of the child welfare system such as the requirements placed on social workers, legal demands of the courts regarding who can serve foster youth and have access to information, and differences among the groups of youth FTF sought to serve. For example, the needs of children in foster care are different from the needs of children who have been placed in kinship care and within that group there are differences between formal and informal kinship arrangements. There was a steep learning curve and having had someone more familiar with the system would have been helpful.

Staff turnover – Key partners, both in the governmental and nonprofit sectors, had significant staff turnover, from the highest administrative levels to the direct service providers. Thus, the “face” of the initiative and of the ecosystem kept changing, often before traction could be made in changing policies and procedures, which, according to key informants, ultimately impacted the effectiveness of collaboration.

The relationship with HSA was especially impacted by turnover. A key manager from HSA was one of the initial co-designers of this initiative, and she held specific ideas about how the FTF initiative would complement, not compete with, the support HSA already provided to foster youth. This manager retired, and the agency representation was replaced by two other managers, who themselves later left their positions. Each successive turnover served to lengthen the collaborative distance between HSA and FTF, and thus it may not have always been clear to new HSA representatives what were the goals, activities and value-adds of FTF to their own system of care.

New collaborators’ lack of orientation about the initiative’s goals, especially around asset coaching – For partner employees joining the initiative midway, it was not always clear how all program components fit together toward achieving an ultimate outcome. This was particularly true with respect to the asset coaching component. While the modalities of asset coaching and case management may appear similar, the nature of the specific work with youth and the goals for that work were actually quite distinct. For instance, asset coaching sought to help youth identify life goals and be able to navigate resources and systems to achieve those goals, whereas case management typically seeks to map and meet the myriad needs that youth may have. However, the distinctions between asset coaching and case management were not made as clear as they could have been by FTF leaders, resulting in some confusion at times for youth, partner-agency staff and HSA.

Use of data system to track program effectiveness – Efforts-to-Outcomes (ETO) is a web-based software package that helps social service organizations monitor performance indicators to help improve overall effectiveness. Used by some of the most successful social service programs in the country, ETO saves time and improves service quality and effectiveness by allowing multiple partners to see efforts for their shared youth. The initiative’s management team provided training to all of its personnel and entered baseline data. By the time the initiative sunsetted, HSA and StarVista had also decided to use this system, permanently making it possible for multiple organizations in San Mateo County to immediately update the status of foster youth. Unfortunately, rank and file staff in FTF did not feel comfortable with the complexity of the system as it was originally designed, limiting its usefulness in the collaboration during the initiative.

Difficulty in sharing confidential data – The desire (and legal requirement) to protect the privacy of children in foster care is paramount and yet there are discrepancies from county to county in the way the child welfare agencies handle confidentiality, particularly around education. AB 490 mandates the sharing of certain information among appropriate organizations, but there was often misunderstanding among the partners of the extent of information that could and should be shared. In addition, a child in foster care often receives services from multiple agencies and those agencies are often reticent to share any information about a child with another agency. This lack of data coordination often led to critical information about a case not being shared among components within the system that could advocate and support the needs of the child. Thus, information was sometimes not being acted upon even when services may have been available to better assist the child. This was especially true between school entities and HSA and is still being addressed by the EdSupport Working Group.

Lessons Learned

Greater understanding of partner agencies – When hiring staff for an initiative as complex as this one, an important qualification for staff is for them to have a good understanding of the complexities of the multi-agency, competing policies and disparate stakeholders of the child welfare system in the county.

Greater communication among partners – When seeking to make changes to the system of service delivery offered to children, parents and caregivers in the child welfare system, more communication, buy-in and training of social workers and other HSA staff about initiative goals is needed to ensure collaboration. There is a great need to communicate with the various partners, but importantly, all the partners must be able to communicate among themselves, so that all agencies associated with the initiative are working from the same vantage point.

Be clear about the population being served – The needs of children in foster care are very different from the needs of children in kinship care. Differentiating the needs, resources and legal constraints of the two populations is necessary to effectively provide them with services.

In addition, the level of need of the target population should be clearly delineated. This initiative was not designed to serve those with the highest needs, but rather those poised for success and needing additional support to achieve it. Staff found that the immediate needs of many of the enrolling youth were greater and more intense than anticipated. For those youth, working toward achieving an asset goal was sometimes superseded by crisis situations and staff sometimes found themselves unprepared and ill-qualified to deal with the issues the youth faced.

GOAL 3: EFFECT PUBLIC POLICY CHANGE

The third goal of the initiative was to **effect public policy change** at both regional and state levels. Presented in this section are findings demonstrating the extent to which this goal was accomplished.

In October 2008, Silicon Valley Community Foundation convened an FTF public policy team composed of an FTF individual investor and staff from HSA, StarVista, Edgewood and the Law Foundation. The team agreed upon filters to help determine the appropriateness of a specific issue or piece of legislation. Members met several times but the work never took hold. HSA could only take positions on the few issues that reflected official agency stances. Nonprofit partners were interested in specific elements of the policy work, but without dedicated public policy staff, they were unable to participate fully. The Law Foundation worked on a number of bills, in both sponsoring and supporting roles. The community foundation also was active. The Law Foundation and community foundation did not take positions on behalf of the initiative, but on behalf of their individual organizations.

Accomplishments

Significant Fostering the Future funds were provided in early 2009 to the John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes to support their successful advocacy for the passage of AB 12. President Bush signed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (Public Law 110-351) into law in October 2008. One major provision of this act allowed states to extend foster care benefits to youth up to age 21, a three-year extension beyond the former age of 18. Another provision gave states the option of using federal funds to financially assist qualified non-birth-parent relatives who were caring for children in kinship care. The act also required that states pass similar legislation in order to take advantage of federal matching funds. The passage of AB 12, the California Fostering Connections to Success Act, in 2010 ensured that California would opt into the new federal funding opportunities to support foster youth up to the age of 21 years. FTF partners took individual lobbying steps to support this bill.

Because of the great mobility of youth in the foster care system as they move from placement to placement, they often have difficulty obtaining needed medical care or insurance. Therefore, the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley sponsored AB 1512, which brought about needed changes to California's Medi-Cal program by mandating that counties that place foster children in an out-of-county placement unenroll the child from Medi-Cal within two business days of placement so that the child may be quickly re-enrolled within the county of placement.

In 2006, Fostering the Future provided funding to support the founding of the San Mateo County chapter of the California Youth Connection (CYC), an advocacy group composed of current and former foster youth. Youth members of FTF were among the group of CYC members who visited Sacramento for Day at the Capital. They underwent public policy training and then advocated for housing and other supports for foster youth. FTF also helped the chapter secure additional funding throughout the life of the initiative.

The community foundation also advocated successfully in opposition to proposed cuts in funding for THP-Plus, the successful transitional housing plan for emancipated youth. A portion of the grant to the John Burton Foundation also went to similar lobbying efforts on behalf of THP-Plus.

FTF partners also participated on task forces related to foster youth in an effort to share their expertise and bring about needed changes. The legal advocate was a member of two statewide task forces: California Foster Youth Education Task Force and the Accessing Health Services for California's Children in Foster Care Task

Force. The project manager sat on the San Mateo County Foster Youth Employment Workgroup, the EdSuccess Partnership, EdSupport Working Group, the Northern California Grantmaker’s Child Welfare Circle, Youth Transition Action Team steering committee and the leadership team of San Mateo County’s Adolescent Collaborative Action Team.

Challenges

To sufficiently make changes to the massive child welfare system in California and to effectively mitigate long-standing problems experienced by youth in the foster care system requires both buy-in and “star-power” from those organizations most able to impact policy and make political change. Partnerships with practitioners in county governments and community-based organizations was an absolute necessity, even when those partners potentially had competing or differing perspectives on how to create policy change.

Lessons Learned

Dedicated staff for policy work – Public policy work takes dedication and time. Partners that do not focus on policy work are hesitant to dedicate resources and may not have the available resources to commit. Furthermore, the initiative itself was not a formal entity and therefore chose not to take policy positions but to leave those up to the individual organizations.

Role of foundations – Through its active support of legislation, the community foundation served as one of the most important vehicles of change in this arena. An important lesson learned was the fact that a seemingly non-political entity, a foundation, can have a significant role in political change, and do so without alienating current or potential funders.

GOAL 4: MEASURE IMPACT AND DISSEMINATE LESSONS LEARNED

Evaluations essentially measure social efforts, outcomes and impact, and if initiated at the beginning of a project, this information leads to improved program management, more effective planning efforts and a way to communicate to internal and external stakeholders the “value” of the work being done. This section of the report discusses the findings associated with the initiative’s fourth goal, to measure impact and disseminate lessons learned.

Accomplishments

Mid-way through the implementation of FTF, staff, partners and other supporters realized the project was not reaching the level of desired impact, or at least not in a demonstrable manner. In the fall of 2007, more than half way through the six-year funding cycle of the initiative, Applied Survey Research (ASR) was retained as project evaluators and undertook an extensive outcome evaluation of the initiative’s efforts. The evaluation of this wide-ranging process included:

1. A logic model outlining the needs, efforts and desired outcomes of the initiative (Fall 2007).
2. Interviews with asset coaches to elicit feedback about the initiative’s work (Spring 2008).
3. Youth interviews and focus groups to “test” the initiative’s outcomes (Winter 2008).
4. A revised logic model reflecting the redesign of the initiative (Spring 2009).
5. The creation of data collection tools (e.g., youth survey, staff observations and Y-FI survey) (Spring 2009).
6. The administration and collection of pre/post youth surveys (Spring 2009 – Winter 2010).
7. The administration and collection of pre/post staff observations (Spring 2009 – Winter 2010).
8. A focus group with the three principle staff members working directly with youth (Winter 2009).
9. Key informant interviews with stakeholders (Spring 2010).
10. Triangulated case study of nine youth, their parents and asset coach (Winter 2010).
11. Content analysis of programs’ success stories (Winter 2010).
12. Document review (e.g., initiative’s target summaries) (Winter 2010).

The community foundation forged strong relationships with funders of other foster care initiatives in the state and across the country through membership on the Youth Transition Funders Group, the Philanthropic Efforts Group and the Child Welfare Circle of Northern California Grantmakers. These relationships were invaluable when creating the Y-FI program and many lessons were shared with teams from the California Connected by 25 Initiative.

Each quarter, target summary reports were sent to all investors in the initiative. This kept them all aware of the activities and promoted financial and programmatic support even from some of those investors who were not deeply engaged on the investment council.

Challenges

There were multiple challenges in undertaking an evaluation of the initiative. The mobility of the youth, moving from home to home, in and then out of county, in and out of detention made data collection difficult, particularly in light of the time that had passed between the youth exiting some of the programs and

the onset of data collection. Starting the evaluation well into the program also negatively impacted the ability to collect useful data in a timely fashion.

Struggles with inputting data into ETO, as mentioned on page 36, made data retrieval later for evaluation purposes essentially impossible.

Lessons Learned

Communication with stakeholders – Keeping program partners and funders apprised of progress toward project goals was an important means of maintaining support for the initiative, especially when obstacles were encountered. The quarterly target summaries provided a useful way of informing stakeholders of what was going well with the project, and honestly shared areas that could be improved. Investors and partners appreciated the transparency and understood the struggles; there were few, if any, surprises.

Establish measurable outcomes at the beginning of the project – In order to fully maintain a unified vision of success, it is imperative that measurable outcomes be determined at the very beginning of the project. Otherwise, there will be a continued revisiting of the question of what constitutes success. As new collaborators are brought to the project table, they too, need to be familiarized with formal goals and outcomes of the project. When changes to outcomes are necessary, all partners must agree and make changes to their particular system for data collection.

GOAL 5: DEVELOP AND LEVERAGE RESOURCES

Even with the large commitment of dollars from the Peninsula Community Foundation (one of the parent organizations of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation), a program with the scope of Fostering the Future required additional resources to meet its full agenda. Funds were leveraged, where possible, and additional resources were sought as needed. These additional resources may have been in the form of dollars, people or partnerships.

Accomplishments

The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors provided annual support for the community foundation to manage the initiative and pitched in with support of aspects of the work such as a van for StarVista and some matching funds for Y-FI. Over the course of the initiative, San Mateo County provided over \$300,000 in support.

The initiative received \$200,000 from the Foster Youth Housing Initiative, an effort by four California foundations (The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation and Sobrato Family Foundation) to help former foster youth obtain and retain permanent housing. Had FTF not already existed, this funding would not have come to San Mateo County.

A total of 17 individual donors contributed almost \$700,000 to the FTF plan and significant additional funds to projects or organizations in support of foster youth that came to their attention directly through FTF. Those included the Early Academic Planning Camp at San Jose State University for rising 8th grade foster youth, WildLife Associates' Wildlife Stewards program for youth in emergency shelters or group homes in San Mateo County, CASA of San Mateo County and the San Mateo County chapter of the California Youth Connection.

The initiative had an investment council composed of individual investors and community and government partners. Using the target summary reports as a framework, they reviewed the activities of the previous quarter and provided input on challenging issues. Over the six years of the initiative, only one investor resigned and the other five investors have continued to stay engaged, offering their insights. From the community foundation perspective, this serves as an effective donor engagement tool that not only supports the initiative but also allows the investors to learn more about foster care and at-risk youth issues they care about deeply.

Lessons Learned

Exit Strategy – An exit strategy is integral to all social venture funds. Most foundations make grants for a one- or two-year period, and there is usually no commitment made to the funded organization(s) beyond the initial period of time. This initiative was created as a six-year social venture; therefore, a more structured approach to the foundation's exit from funding was necessary, especially given the systems' changes that were created. The implicit exit strategy that existed for the initiative was that HSA would incorporate much of the philosophy and approach into their system-of-care model and that partner organizations would find additional funding to support key personnel after foundation support ended. The former has happened, to some degree, and one partner, the Law Foundation, has been able to obtain funding to support some of the legal advocate's continuing work in San Mateo County. Edgewood has taken the asset coaching model and incorporated that into the work of its community workers because they were not able to raise the funding required to maintain a full-time asset coach. StarVista will be able to continue to support emancipated youth

in Start2Save with funding from the state for financial education and some dedicated funding at the community foundation for matching funds.

Stricter adherence to terms of the memoranda of understanding – There was a joint memorandum of understanding crafted each year of the initiative and signed by all partners. Some of the elements were not totally executed, however, and should have been before the release of additional funding. For example, it was imperative that line staff use the ETO data collection service and funding could have been withheld when that was not done. However, that could have undermined the entire initiative since there are no alternative agencies in the county to deliver these services.

HOW THE EFFORTS OF THE INITIATIVE COMPARE TO OTHER SIMILAR EFFORTS

At about the same time that Fostering the Future was launched, two similar foundation-supported efforts addressing the needs of California’s transition-aged foster youth began: California Connected by 25 Initiative and Youth Transition Action Team initiative. While there was some overlap in objectives, these two initiatives placed a greater emphasis on job preparation than FTF. Conversely, FTF also differed from these with its strong emphasis on personal asset development. Each initiative took a different approach as well, as it attempted to change the systems which serve these youth.

California Connected by 25 Initiative

The California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I) sought to support foster youth transitioning into successful adulthood through positive youth development and an integrated system of supports and services. This effort was funded by five foundation partners (the Annie E. Casey Foundation Family to Family Initiative, the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, the Stuart Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation) with additional leveraged local, state and national funding. Five counties (not including San Mateo County) implemented strategies across seven key areas starting in 2005: K-12 education, employment/job training/post-secondary education, financial competency and asset development, housing, independent living skills programs, personal/social asset development and permanency.¹⁰ The goal was to create systems change to ensure the development of a continuum of support for youth. The following successes and lessons learned were identified for each area among the counties:

EDUCATION – The goal was to overcome negative educational outcomes due to changes in foster care placement and schools.¹¹

Efforts/Successes: 1) child welfare agencies designated education liaison staff; 2) agencies trained their staff on youths’ educational rights and how to better serve their educational needs; 3) agencies offered training to schools and districts on foster youth challenges and relevant legislation; 4) the initiative implemented systems of data-sharing between child welfare agencies and schools; 5) provided tutoring and supports to low performing foster youth; and 6) agencies provided information to youth and caregivers on education rights, graduation requirements and available resources.

Lessons Learned: 1) anticipate the possibility of high level leadership change and emphasize the value of developing and sustaining agency collaboration and community partnership; 2) small scale, targeted program interventions are an effective first step; 3) supporting the needs of out-of-county youth were challenging and remain unaddressed; and 4) data-sharing and outcome tracking must overcome barriers of agencies with different missions, confidentiality rules and multiple stakeholders – developing a memorandum of understanding is the first step.

HOUSING SUPPORT – The goal was to counter the high rates of housing instability and homelessness experienced by foster youth due to the lack of a family safety net.¹²

Efforts/Successes: 1) increased units of transitional housing funded by THP-Plus; 2) partnered with

¹⁰ CC25I Systems Change Assessment Team (Sommer, H. et al). (2007). California Connected by 25: An Introduction to the Initiative Summary Report. UC Berkeley’s Center for Child and Youth Policy.

¹¹ CC25I Systems Change Assessment Team (Sommer, H. et al). (2009). California Connected by 25: Efforts to Address the K-12 Educational Needs of Transitioning Foster Youth. UC Berkeley’s Center for Child and Youth Policy.

¹² CC25I Systems Change Assessment Team (Sommer, H. et al). (2009). California Connected by 25: Efforts to Address the Housing Needs of Transitioning Foster Youth. UC Berkeley’s Center for Child and Youth Policy.

public agencies and community organizations to develop and operate transitional housing units and provided case management and support services; and 3) offered a variety of housing models to build on permanency and lifelong-connection efforts.

Lessons Learned: 1) host family and roommate dynamics can be a challenge; 2) case management for housing participants can be critical; 3) support services for housing participants and for host families were beneficial; 4) transitional housing participants can benefit from money-management assistance; and 5) transitional housing must accommodate the needs of youth attending post-secondary education and training programs.

FINANCIAL LITERACY AND ASSET DEVELOPMENT – the goal was to address the lack of a financial safety net and guidance in making financial decisions.¹³

Efforts/Successes: 1) provided financial literacy training, 2) established Individual Development Account (IDA) programs and 3) created youth advisory or youth leadership boards to help guide services for current and former foster youth.

Lessons Learned: 1) implementation of IDA programs can require significant start-up time; 2) close integration of IDA program and ILSP has advantages; 3) working with contracted service providers poses solutions and challenges; 4) IDA youth should be linked to employment and housing programs; 5) youth require support services to succeed in financial competency programs; 6) IDA programs must be designed to promote thoughtful purchases of assets; 7) strategies to serve younger youth can evolve over time; and 8) counties see sustaining IDA programs as a major, ongoing challenge.

CC25I had additional goals related to permanency connections and post-secondary education, job training and employment which were emphasized less in this initiative and not detailed here.

The Youth Transition Action Team Initiative

The Youth Transition Action Team initiative (YTAT), launched in 2004, sought to address the issue of transition for youth aging out of foster care by working with California county child welfare agencies engaged in system improvement activities.¹⁴ In each of 14 California counties, Transition Action Teams were formed and composed of leaders from the child welfare, education, workforce development, juvenile justice and other local systems which worked together with philanthropy to improve transition outcomes for youth touched by the child welfare system.¹⁵ YTAT partners included New Ways to Work (facilitating partner), Casey Family Programs (initiative sponsor), Walter S. Johnson Foundation, Jewish Community Foundation, Peninsula Community Foundation (now Silicon Valley Community Foundation), The San Francisco Foundation, The Child and Family Policy Institute of California and The Foster Youth Employment, Training and Housing Taskforce.

YTAT sought to improve outcomes for youth aging out of the foster care system in the following areas:

- Educational achievement and aspiration including: successful completion of high school, grades and credits earned, course of study meeting the standards for CSU admission, enrollment or plans for enrollment in post-secondary education and scholarships earned.
- Workforce readiness including: the creation of a career-development portfolio, earning a work readiness certificate, successful completion of career development/professional-technical coursework

¹³CC25I Systems Change Assessment Team (Sommer, H. et al). (2009). California Connected by 25: Efforts to Address Financial Competency and Asset Development Among Transitioning Foster Youth. UC Berkeley's Center for Child and Youth Policy.

¹⁴New Ways to Work website <http://www.newwaystowork.org/Initiatives/ytatarchive.html>

¹⁵Youth Transition Action Teams Fact Sheet <http://www.nww.org/documents/ytatdocuments/YouthTransitionActionTeamFactsheet.pdf>

and related activities and participation in a sequenced range of work-based learning activities and employment experience.

- Employment at a level sufficient to provide the resources for independent living.
- Support networks including formal and informal positive relationships with peers, adults and institutions.

YTAT results include:

- Helped youth-serving systems in California counties change the way they view and work with foster youth.
- Established and increased cross-system collaboration between child welfare, workforce development, social services, education and/or philanthropy.
- Increased the number of career development and employment preparation experiences available to foster youth.
- Created meaningful ways for youth to participate in shaping their own transition plans, interventions and programs.
- Increased the focus on foster youth in the California youth workforce system.

New Ways to Work is leveraging the lessons learned and impacts from YTAT in California to launch a national Foster Youth Pathways to Employment Initiative.

CONCLUSIONS

The six-year journey of Fostering the Future resulted in many direct benefits to foster and kinship youth in San Mateo County. Additionally, it extended its reach to both building upon the strengths of and benefiting partner organizations; called attention to some underserved needs of foster and kinship youth in the web of systems set up to support them; supported and advocated for important legislation affecting this population; and leveraged a host of resources which were woven into a comprehensive initiative approach. Along the way many lessons were learned which will benefit future endeavors to support this vulnerable population of young people.

Key “Take-Aways”

Plan and define as much as possible – A key component of project management is the thorough development of the work plan. Such a plan was drawn up annually among all of the partners as were operating agreements created between each nonprofit partner and the community foundation. It would have been helpful to have had such a one-on-one agreement with HSA as well.

Several years into the initiative, standards of practice were created for asset coaching, community hour and legal advocacy. Conflicts among agencies with similar positions could have been mitigated by the creation of these standards earlier in the initiative process.

Having asset coaches employed by two different agencies and yet trying to standardize the work may have been unrealistic, just as it may have been unrealistic to expect support for foster youth to look the same as support for kinship youth. The needs and characteristics of different target youth were elemental to the work and required clearer differentiation.

Remain flexible, to a point – Because there really is no way to anticipate every potential problem, flexibility must be incorporated into the plan. Too much flexibility, however, can cause problems. The frequent revisiting of goals and objectives of the initiative, changes to strategies and changes to stakeholder commitment, hurt the collective ability to capture change and determine what constitutes success. There should be a mechanism in place to manage anticipated change rather than allowing the project to slowly, inadvertently, “creep” away from the original design.

Community foundations can play key leadership roles in addressing challenging social issues – As the project manager, Silicon Valley Community Foundation sought to be a part of the problem-solving group of community activists who effected change in the foster care system. The foundation played a second role in marshaling the resources of investors who sought to make change. This dual role was extraordinary, but also, at times, difficult to pilot.

In its role as an organizer of social investors, the community foundation was able to harness resources where found and link a variety of funders to the initiative. In that role, it connected interested investors to a cause they supported and facilitated their continued involvement with this population within and beyond the initiative. When working directly to implement and grow the initiative to meet its objectives, however, the community foundation was placed in a more tactical and politically difficult role as it attempted to coordinate different factions working to implement the project. There were times when the two roles appeared to interfere with each other, leaving partners unclear on the foundation’s role as funder or program manager and there were other times when the tactical role and visionary ones were complementary, building off each other.