



By Patrick Lawler

Collaborative Partnerships Raise Outcomes for Transition-Age Foster Youth

David lived every day expecting to be homeless. He was behind in his rent and knew it was just a matter of time before he came home to find his belongings set out on the sidewalk.

Like many other transition-age former foster youth, the young man lacked the intensive support needed to overcome housing, transportation, employment, and health obstacles to become an independent adult.

Just when things looked most dire, David was given the opportunity to participate in YVLifeSet, a program model offered in Philadelphia through a collaboration that brought together the Philadelphia Department of Human Services, Turning Points for Children, Youth Villages, and local philanthropists.

Every year, around 20,000 young people turn 18 in foster care without being reunited with their biological parents. Some states have extended foster care to 21, offering varying levels of continued support.

Researchers tell us that without help, transition-age foster youth are more likely to be homeless; less likely to find stable employment at livable wages; less likely to finish their education; and more likely to have mental health issues. The societal costs can be up to \$300,000 per young person. In 1999, Youth Villages began developing the YVLifeSet model to help this most disadvantaged group and has since served more than 13,000 young people.

The model pairs young people with specialists who have small caseloads and meet with young people in the community weekly, helping them set and achieve their goals around housing, transportation, education,



David (at left), a YVLifeSet program participant.

employment, health, and relationships through experiential learning.

We've tracked the results of the young adults who participated in the program, and in 2015, the model showed positive impacts in a large, randomized controlled trial.¹ The five-year trial, conducted by national social research firm MDRC, showed that the model decreased homelessness, increased economic well-being, increased mental health, and decreased domestic or partner violence.

Reaching more transition-age young people with this evidence-informed model became a driving passion for our organization. We had expanded YVLifeSet to reach every transition-age

youth who needed intensive support in Tennessee through public-private partnerships—a 50-50 split in funding between the Tennessee Department of Children's Services and Youth Villages' private donors, primarily The Day Foundation. We used innovative funding solutions, sometimes leveraging Medicaid dollars, to expand in Georgia, Massachusetts, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Oregon.

Our audacious goal was to make the program available to each of the young people who need it across the country.

But, we soon realized that we would never be able to achieve our goal

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efforts in place for Value Curve stage progression. *Likely focus as an Opportunity Ecosystem:* scaling the JeffCo Prosperity Partnership into their public-school system and strategically defining the future state of their community ecosystem as a baseline for assessment of progress and a tool for advancing it.

■ **Mecklenburg County, NC (Charlotte)**—currently working with APHSA's OE team to perform a system assessment and develop a new "post-service" delivery model. *Likely focus as an Opportunity Ecosystem site:* In response to community demonstrations in the wake of police violence and a Harvard report that noted Charlotte/Mecklenburg as one of the worst cities in the country for economic mobility, several willing partners are committed to working across sectors to impact system change by focusing on social determinants of health and addressing root causes of inequality.

■ **Montgomery County, MD**—also worked with the APHSA OE team,

and mature efforts are in place for Value Curve stage progression, ecosystem development, and racial equity toward improved SEM. *Likely focus as an Opportunity Ecosystem site:* support population health and well-being efforts for three specific groups and challenges: low-birthweight babies among African Americans, diabetes among Hispanic Americans, and mental health problems among Asian Americans.

Additional sites will have the opportunity to learn and co-create solutions with each other as part of a virtual institute.

Opportunity Ecosystem External Evaluation

APHSA has also contracted with an evaluator, Margaret Hargreaves, PhD, a Senior Fellow at NORC at the University of Chicago, to conduct a developmental evaluation of the journey each Opportunity Ecosystem site will take toward increasing social

and economic mobility and racial equity in their communities. The evaluation will capture system conditions and dynamics (boundaries, relationships, perspectives); the nature of the sites' interventions (how they will be governed and executed), how the interventions are designed to achieve intended outcomes; and points of influence (stakeholders, resources, policies) of local systems that affect the operation and impact of the ecosystem improvement interventions as they unfold.

Over the next three years, APHSA will work to identify the "true north" approach to building an opportunity ecosystem and to share the experiences and lessons learned in implementing strategies toward that goal. Future articles will focus on these experiences with an emphasis on lessons learned in the process. Stay tuned! 📺



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through providing direct services. With the trial results and the backing of Blue Meridian Partners and other philanthropies, Youth Villages began seeking public agencies and implementing provider partners to help scale more quickly. The organization provides clinical, administrative, and research support to partners.

Last spring, Youth Villages announced matching grants to New Yorkers for Children, on behalf of the New York City Administration for Children's Services, and the Allegheny County Department of Human Services in Pennsylvania, for the program. Connecticut will begin implementing the program through private providers this spring following a competitive procurement process.

In October, Youth Villages awarded \$10 million in matching grants to

public children's agencies in the District of Columbia, Illinois, Los Angeles, and Louisiana. In Louisiana and Washington, DC, Youth Villages, for the first time, will be training and supporting public agency staff in implementing the YVLifeSet model. The funding process will continue in 2019.

There is real diversity in how states and counties are serving older foster youth, and we see an incredible opportunity for learning from each other and sharing information among our public agency partners and implementing providers. We're honored to be joined by some of the most innovative public agency leaders and most effective provider organizations.

This issue is about more than one organization or one model. It is about demonstrating a standard of care, showing that we collectively,

as a country, can move the needle on outcomes for this very disadvantaged population.

Youth Villages hopes to bring together a network of partners committed to changing the trajectory of young people, just like David in Philadelphia. He began working with his YVLifeSet specialist in December 2017; for the first time, he was setting goals and achieving them. Now, David has stable housing, a job, and is enrolled in community college. 📺

Patrick Lawler is CEO of Youth Villages, one of the largest private providers of mental and behavioral services to children and their families in the country.

Reference Note

1. See <http://bit.ly/2qrAzuW>.