

CONNECTED YOUTH INITIATIVE (CYI)

SOCIAL INNOVATION FUND (SIF) EVALUATION REPORT HIGHLIGHTS (2020)



Connected Youth Initiative
nebraskachildren

The Connected Youth Initiative achieves moderate evidence rating.

AT A GLANCE

Highlights of Evaluation of the Connected Youth Initiative: Final Report (2020), an independent evaluation report prepared by WestEd, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research, development, and service agency. For a copy of the full report, [click here](#).

ABOUT THIS STUDY

CYI serves young people ages 14-24 who lack family support and: are currently or have been in the Nebraska foster care system, have had contact with child protective services, have had contact with the juvenile justice system, and/or are homeless or near homeless. CYI uses a collective impact approach to create systems change in Nebraska communities and serves young people through an array of services and supports.

The evaluation report examines the impact and implementation of CYI in six rural collaboratives across Nebraska. The study considers data collected over the course of more than three years. Implementation questions focused on 1) capacity and community context, 2) implementation of CYI, 3) and collective impact and sustainability. Impact questions focused on 1) the extent to which CYI improved young people's overall well-being and, secondarily, 2) how participants fared in terms of changes in certain sub-domains of well-being. Impact study questions were answered using a quasi-experimental, matched comparison group design.

EVIDENCE RATINGS

The impact study design and its associated findings met moderate evidence standards set by Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), determining the study was well implemented and supports the effectiveness of CYI.

WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

For young people who participated in the study, coaching was the component most frequently accessed. Specifically, across all the CYI communities, 741 young people in the study received some type of service. Of these 741 young people, 54% accessed coaching, 25% accessed support services funding, 25% took part in youth leadership, and 25% accessed Opportunity Passport. However, analysis shows that young people engaged with the components of CYI in 16 different types of combinations, meaning that different participants accessed different types of services in different combinations—even while coaching was the most common component across all.

Matched comparison data show that outcomes for young people were generally positive. Specifically, impact estimates among participants suggest that CYI participation is associated with the following outcomes: a safe and stable living situation, financial stability, perceived hope, and decreased emergency care utilization.

It was anticipated that the overall well-being of participants would also show statistically significant improvement, as measured through holistic cross-section of well-being composed of items related to participants' finances, education, housing, employment, health, transportation, and permanence. However, this was not seen to occur.

Additionally, while the study achieved a moderate evidence rating, the quasi-experimental study lacked baseline equivalence between groups on age and multiple outcomes, and also suffered from attrition bias. Thus, findings should be interpreted with caution due to concerns with the internal validity of the impact study.



3.8x greater odds of having a safe and stable living situation



1.8x greater odds of having enough funds for expenses and **4x greater odds** of having a savings account



Estimated **13% improvement** in perceived hope



Up to **71% lower odds** of multiple ER visits

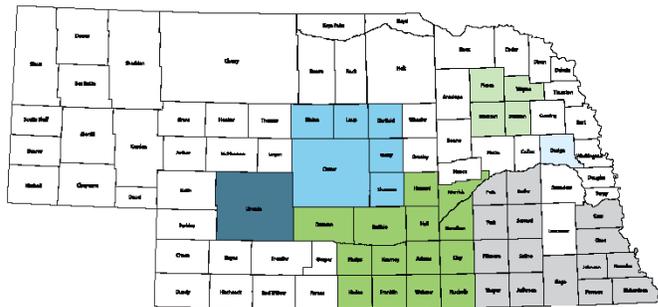
Implementation study findings also include insights from community collaboratives. Notably, some community-level staff indicated that setting the CYI model within a collaborative infrastructure often generated greater awareness and understanding of the unconnected youth population within their community.

NEXT STEPS

CYI will carry on with its implementation in SIF communities until the end of the SIF contract period (March 31, 2020). During this time, Nebraska Children will work with each collaborative and its CYI workgroup to define what CYI will look like moving forward. It will vary by collaborative depending on the specific needs, focus, and additional resources to support young people who might be served through CYI. Nebraska Children is actively reflecting on the CYI experience, including the SIF evaluation, and how the initiative fits within its broader efforts to engage and support older youth populations across the state.

Connected Youth Initiative Social Innovation Fund Evaluation Report Highlights

SIF CYI BACKGROUND AND MODEL



SIF expanded existing CYI efforts to rural regions, adding six community collaboratives covering 40 counties (pictured above)

- Youth ages 14-24 who lack family support, and: are currently or have been in the Nebraska foster care system, have had contact with child protective services, have had contact with the juvenile justice system (but not current), and/or are homeless or near homeless
- Collective impact approach to create systems change in rural Nebraska communities
- Essential CYI elements: Youth Leadership, Opportunity Passport™ Program (OP), support service funding, voluntary case management (coaching), and system support.

STUDY BACKGROUND

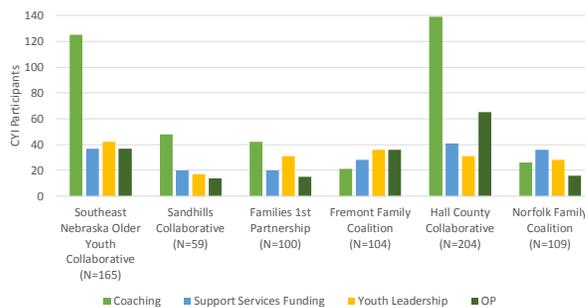
- 2015 SIF Cohort*
- Partners: Nebraska Children, WestEd, Nebraska Center for Justice Research, Category One Consulting
- Builds on preliminary evidence of positive impacts

DESIGN, METHODS, RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To what extent **does the CYI improve dimensions of well-being** for the young persons who participate compared to similar young people who do not participate?

- Quasi-experimental Design – Propensity score **matched comparison**
- Extensive implementation data** collection
- Bi-annual youth **self-report surveys**
- Well-being index** development

IMPLEMENTATION



Youth

- 741 youth received services (June 2016 - March 2019)
- 16 different service combinations
- 54% received coaching

Collaborative

- History and partnerships led to variation in implementation and timeline
- Great focus on collaborative structure and federal compliance
- Staff capacity varied and turnover was common
- Networking within local economy

HIGHLIGHTED RESULTS

- 3.8x greater odds** of having a **safe and stable living situation**
- 1.8x greater odds** of having enough funds for expenses and **4x greater odds** of having a savings account
- Estimated **13% improvement in perceived hope**
- Up to **71% lower odds** of multiple **ER visits**

Car purchases improve access to jobs → **stable housing and jobs**

Coaching addressed multiple short and long term **barriers**

Community stakeholders increased education on unconnected **older youth population**

LESSONS AND LIMITATIONS

- Rural** geography compounded **challenges** around **staffing, implementation, and grant compliance**
- Transportation** and persistent **housing shortages** were **significant barriers** that require **systemic change**
- Older youth** bring **unique and complex needs** for partners and providers
- The nature and **complexity of CYI** led to **unpredictable recruitment and participation** patterns
- Saturation and reach** are unique issues **within the rural context**
- Treatment effects** were **limited by sample and potential contamination**

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ **Assess commitment** of partners and **identify gaps in capacity**
- ✓ Provide **training in data use** and promote **continuous quality improvement**
- ✓ **Bolster youth involvement in collaborative and leadership**
- ✓ Consider **adaptions for the rural setting** for both **implementation and evaluation** activities
- ✓ **Evaluation staff** could **lead data collection** to allow **site staff more time for programming**
- ✓ **Increase TA, support, and incentives** for youth engagement in evaluation

*This material is based upon work supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) under Social Innovation Fund Grant No. 15SIHNE001. Opinions or points of view expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of, or a position that is endorsed by, CNCS.