

# Site Visit Report: Improving Services Delivery to Youth in the Child Welfare System

## Project Title: Adult Connections for Youth Emancipating From Foster Care (Adult Connections)

Lead Agency: Children's Home + Aid Society of Illinois, Chicago, IL

Award Number: 90CW1142

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## Project Title: Determined, Responsible, Empowered Adolescents Mentoring Relationships (DREAMR)

Lead Agency: Clark County Department of Family Services [DFS], Las Vegas, NV

Award Number: 90CW1140

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## Project Title: Works Wonders

Lead Agency: Foster Forward [formerly the Rhode Island Foster Parents Association]  
East Providence, RI

Award Number: 90CW1141

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## Project Title: YMCA Connections Program (Connections)

Lead Agency: YMCA of San Diego County, San Diego, CA

Award Number: 90CW1143

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In 2011, the Children’s Bureau published a funding opportunity announcement (FOA) titled “Improving Services Delivery to Youth in the Child Welfare System” (HHS-2011-ACF-ACYF-CW-0186). Through this FOA, the Children’s Bureau awarded 5-year grants to support the effective implementation of strategies to help youth at risk of aging out of foster care develop skills to strengthen and manage relationships with biological family members and other important people in their lives. The strategies implemented by the grantees were designed to facilitate reunification, when safe and appropriate, or other legal permanency for older youth in foster care and promote a healthy transition to adulthood. In addition to achieving permanency and/or establishing permanent connections for youth, grantees were charged with developing, implementing, and supporting a framework or practice model to promote protective mechanisms in youth that allowed for increased capacity and skills to build and maintain lasting, healthy relationships. The Children’s Bureau awarded grants to four organizations, which were listed on the first page of this report.

The four grant recipients have extensive histories providing services to children and youth in foster care. As part of the Improving Service Delivery to Youth grant cluster, the projects developed and implemented, or expanded current mentoring programs. Additionally, two of the projects implemented and conducted employment services activities as part of their projects. This report includes information about both aspects of this cluster’s activities. The information included in this report was obtained during a meeting with the grantees on June 17, 2016, in Chicago, IL.

## Mentoring Programs

As part of their Improving Services Delivery to Youth grants, the projects implemented mentoring programs to assist youth in establishing permanent connections to support them as they transitioned from foster care. Some projects developed new mentoring programs, and others expanded upon existing programs. In some instances, these new or renewed relationships resulted in supportive friendships with a caring adult, while others turned into placement resources or a permanent family through adoption.

The information included in this section of the report highlights the mentoring programs. Individuals interviewed for this section included the following:

- Yolanda Washburn, youth engagement specialist, Foster Forward
- Lisa Guillette, executive director, Foster Forward
- Melissa Ludington, vice president of child welfare, Children’s Home + Aid Society
- Ellen Ross, manager of adolescent foster care, Children’s Home + Aid Society
- Krysta Esquivel, associate executive director/project director, YMCA of San Diego County
- Lyndsey Macaranas, YMCA of San Diego County
- Ashley Yates, adult connections specialist, Children’s Home + Aid Society
- Molly Latham, chief executive officer, Big Brothers/Big Sisters (BBBS) of Southern Nevada (DREAMR)
- Catherine Heath, child and family program specialist, Children’s Bureau

## Project Summaries and Need for Service

All of the projects within the cluster provided some type of mentoring, relationship building services to youth in foster care. The goal of these services was to assist youth in foster care strengthen current relationships, establish new relationships, and/or form permanent connections that would provide support to the youth as they transitioned into adulthood.

**Adult Connections:** Children’s Home + Aid Society of Chicago partnered with the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) in Chicago, UCAN, Kaleidoscope, and One Hope United to implement the Adult Connections project. The project’s mentoring program, Success Coaching, was a combination of family finding and mentorships by volunteers. When youth age out of foster care, they may not have lasting, positive connections, particularly when their primary connections are to caseworkers, therapists, and foster parents, who may not continue to have a relationship with them after they age out. By using volunteer mentors, the project wanted to deemphasize the use of paid staff as being the key relationships in young people’s lives. It also wanted to address the tremendous challenges youth face when they age out of foster care, even with the services for which they are eligible to receive until 21 years of age in Illinois.

**DREAMR:** Clark County DFS, the University of Nevada Las Vegas’ Lincy Institute, Southern Nevada Health District, the S.P.I.R.I.T. Project, Olive Crest, Specialized Alternatives for Families and Youth, and BBBS of Southern Nevada partnered to implement the DREAMR project. The goal of the project was to reduce the pregnancy and parenting rates for youth in foster care in Clark County by promoting relational competencies. In addition, DREAMR provided supports to youth to promote school attendance, academic achievement, and smart decision making. The program used the 3-5-7 Model designed to help youth think about their pasts and become emotionally stronger by working through issues of separation and loss and sustaining and building relationships. DREAMR also included a mentoring aspect. As with Adult Connections, DREAMR’s mentoring goal was for an unpaid adult to be a positive role model who could offer friendship to the youth. BBBS of Southern Nevada frequently provides big brothers and big sisters to children and youth involved with child welfare, and its role for the project was to establish mentors (big brothers/big sisters) for the youth referred to the program. Young people who had aged out of foster care served as technical advisers to DREAMR regarding program development, implementation, and volunteer training.

**Works Wonders:** Foster Forward integrated an existing mentoring program into Works Wonders, which focused also on career development and employment engagement. In 2006, Foster Forward launched Real Connections, a diligent search and mentoring initiative in which the agency employed emerging diligent search strategies (e.g., ecomapping, case-record mining, Seneca Search<sup>1</sup>) for young people who were at the highest risk of aging out of foster care without a permanent adult connection. Rhode Island, a State that is heavily reliant on congregate care, had a large number of youth in foster care who did not have a consistent adult in their life beyond paid congregate care staff. The goal of Real Connections was to help mine each youth’s case records and formal and informal networks to identify a mentor for the youth and, cultivate that relationship into a permanent connection. Another component of Real Connections was to recruit community mentors for youth without permanent connections and support these relationships for at least a year to help develop a permanent connection, even perhaps establishing legal permanency. Foster Forward, through the Work Wonders program, strived to connect youth participating in the project to mentors in Real Connections, as well as incorporate newly recruited employer partners to become mentors to the youth. The employer mentors served as social support in the vocational setting

**Connections:** The YMCA of San Diego County did not have a formal volunteer mentoring program, but the goal of the project was to assist and support youth in identifying and maintaining healthy relationships—particularly naturally occurring relationships—through the development or refinement of relational skills. The project did this through an approach based on dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), which promotes four sets of behavioral skills:

- Mindfulness—how to practice of being fully aware and present in the moment
- Distress tolerance—how to tolerate and manage emotional pain in difficult situations

<sup>1</sup> Information about Seneca Search can be found at <http://www.familyfinding.org/search-services.html>.

- Interpersonal effectiveness—how to ask for what you want and say no while maintaining self-respect and relationships with others
- Emotion regulation—how to change emotions that you want to change

The YMCA of San Diego County, having historically provided services to youth involved in child welfare and homeless and runaway youth, determined that these youth have a difficult time managing the natural flow of relationships and handling crises. The goal of the project was to help youth accept what happened to them, accept the people in their lives for who they are, maintain relationships with those people while also feeling deserving of finding new relationships, and knowing how to navigate these new relationships. Rather than having a formal volunteer program, project staff helped youth navigate the relationships in their lives or to establish new, supportive relationships.

To do that, Connections adapted DBT to be administered by nonclinical staff. Through one-on-one coaching by Connections coaches and relational wellness classes cofacilitated by peer coaches,<sup>2</sup> youth were taught the relational competencies grounded in the four skills of DBT. In addition to these components, the Connections coaches were available 24 hours a day to help clients address any crises. For example, if a distressed youth calls the Connections coach, they can engage in a conversation about the skills the youth has learned, how to utilize those skills, and how to regulate emotions in the midst of the crisis. This supportive relationship provides a positive, normal connection for the youth.

## Referrals to Mentoring Program

All of the projects served youth who were currently in or who had been in foster care, and referrals for the projects were generally generated by the child's public or private agency caseworker or foster parent.

<sup>2</sup> The peer coaches were young people formerly in foster care who were employed by the Connections project to provide peer support to youth participants.

**Adult Connections:** Because foster care services in Chicago are privatized, children placed in the custody of the DCFS in Chicago are served by private agencies, including the four private agencies that partnered for this grant—Children's Home + Aid, UCAN, Kaleidoscope, and One Hope United. These agencies provided the project with lists of youth who met the following eligibility criteria for the project: between 17 and 20.5 years of age, permanency goal of another planned permanent living arrangement (emancipation), and resident of Cook County, IL. The evaluators conducted additional eligibility screenings to determine which of these youth required services offered by the program. Once the project determined a youth was eligible for project services, the program evaluators conducted an initial research interview and then randomly placed the youth into the group that received services from Success Coaching or the control group, who received the general services typically provided to youth in foster care.

Children's Home + Aid Society wanted the participation to be youth driven. As a result, if a youth initially decided not to participate in the program, the youth, if part of the intervention group, could request and receive a mentor any time during the grant period.

**DREAMR:** The project received most of its referrals from foster parents who initially applied for a mentor for a youth placed in their homes. As the grant period progressed, DREAMR developed positive relationships with some of the larger foster care providers in the area, which also became referral sources. The county child welfare services agency also referred children to the project.

The age range for the project was initially 14 to 21 years, but in the second year of the grant, DREAMR changed the population to include only youth 14 to 18 years of age who were not pregnant or parenting, due to the number of referrals for youth 19 to 20 years of age who were pregnant or parenting and who did not elect to participate in the project during the first year.

**Works Wonders:** Youth were selected to participate in the project through the pool of eligible youth 14 to 21 years of age who received other services from Foster Forward. Although referrals to the project were sometimes made by the assigned caseworker, the Rhode Island Consolidated Youth Services contract with the Department of Children, Youth and Families provides a universal screening for every youth in foster care when they turn 16 years of age that generates information about what services the youth may be eligible for, and Foster Forward links directly into the Rhode Island Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System. Foster Forward staff conduct an assessment on the youth and determine if the youth is interested in participating in the project. If so, the youth is enrolled in the program. In addition, individuals attending the permanency team meetings or case staffings may identify Real Connections as a resource for youth.

**Connections:** The project worked very closely with San Diego County Child Welfare Services and received some referrals from them. The project also received referrals from nonprofit agencies that provided independent living services to youth in foster care. According to project staff, these were the youth most likely to accept the services.

## Selecting and Supporting Mentors

The projects stressed the importance of remembering that mentors are being sought for youth and not the other way around. Grantees reported that the transient nature of this youth population and the difficulty in making contact with them was sometimes challenging to the mentors. Once the relationship between the youth and the mentor was established, it was naturally occurring and the sponsoring agency did not have to provide much support but was available if needed.

The training for the volunteers addressed the purpose of mentoring the youth: being a supportive adult to the young person. The guidance to mentors also addressed when it is acceptable to spend money on the youth (e.g., when celebrating a graduation or birthday) and that spending money on the youth should not be the foundation of the relationship.

**Adult Connections:** In starting the program, Children's Home + Aid Society hoped that a youth would identify adults with whom they already had a good relationship (e.g., a relative, a teacher, a coach, a former foster parent, a former caseworker) and reconnect the youth with that individual. The role of Success Coaching staff was to help the youth navigate and rebuild those relationships. If the youth believed that this person was a potential mentor, the staff would help establish the supportive adult as a success coach and provide support to the relationship for at least 1 year.

Youth were allowed to either identify an adult already in their lives to be a mentor or they could have the project recruit a volunteer mentor for them. The majority of the youth interviewed for the program stated a desire to be paired with a volunteer with whom they did not have a previous relationship. Adult Connections spent a great deal of time recruiting, onboarding, and training volunteers to prepare them for a mentorship that did not include a minimum commitment for frequency of contacts. The project allowed the youth, with input from the mentor, to establish the frequency and methods of contacts, e.g., text, telephone, face-to-face.

**DREAMR:** BBBS of Southern Nevada has an extensive history and established process for matching children with big brothers/big sisters (mentors). However, at times there were difficulties recruiting mentors for the youth involved in the DREAMR program. The big brother/big sister volunteers for DREAMR were required to go through the same application and training process required of all BBBS volunteers and were also required to participate in special training about adolescence, healthy human sexuality, and healing from abuse and neglect. DREAMR technical advisers spoke to the volunteers during their training to provide insight about being a child involved in child welfare. Project leaders reported facing challenges tracking the placements and contact information for the youth involved with the project due to the frequency of placement moves as well as the additional challenge that some foster caregivers' were reluctant to engage with the mentoring program.

**Works Wonders:** Real Connections uses ecomaps, record mining, and Seneca Searches to locate possible mentors within the youth's network. However, if an adult is not available or is unwilling to act as a formal mentor, Real Connections will recruit a community mentor. Real Connections staff tried to identify, select, and support mentors who could assist youth with issues such as building financial capability, promoting sexual health, succeeding in school, and establishing goals. The background check for mentors is substantial and has many of the same requirements as Foster Forward for potential foster parents.

All mentors receive 8 hours of training, which has a substantial focus on trauma and what the experience of being in foster care is like. Real Connections staff and a youth in foster care (or a youth formerly in foster care) facilitate the training, which provides real life context to the importance of the work. The mentors are reminded that the young person they are mentoring has been involved in child welfare.

**Connections:** Although Connections did not have a formal mentoring component, it was relationally focused, using both professional and peer coaches to help youth navigate the relationships in their lives and to establish new, supportive relationships. Teaching youth these skills helps them navigate forming their own network of supportive people.

Connections determined that child welfare caseworkers and other professionals working with youth can and should be better mentors to the youth they work with. Child welfare staff can model healthy relationships for the youth and assist them in establishing the skills and relational approaches necessary to navigate the child welfare system and connect with the various professionals, family members, and other youth. Therefore, Connections developed the C.A.V.E. (Compassion, Awareness, Validation, and Empowerment) training, an evidence-informed approach to working with transition-aged youth to increase well-being and engagement in services.

C.A.V.E. is relationally focused and helps those involved with transition-aged youth to connect and align with the youth while also facilitating healthy brain development. C.A.V.E. is a layman's approach to DBT. Connections trained over 100 professionals in the public and private sector of San Diego County and, at the time of the site visit, were beginning to train foster parents.<sup>3</sup>

## Sustainability

All the projects planned to sustain some, if not all, of the interventions they developed and implemented as part of these grants.

**Adult Connections:** Children's Home + Aid Society of Illinois has always had a mentoring program within their development department, and will continue to provide mentoring services to youth. In addition, Children's Home + Aid Society of Illinois was awarded a contract from the State to develop a new adolescent foster care model that includes an adult connection specialist, which will help sustain the work of preparing youth as they transition into adulthood.

**DREAMR:** BBBS of Southern Nevada plans to continue working with youth in foster care by providing mentors for that population. Clark County has provided funding for the next 3 years for BBBS of Southern Nevada to continue work with youth involved with the child welfare system.

**Works Wonders:** Real Connections will continue as part of the integrated service array offered by the agency through the use of public and private funds awarded to Foster Forward, including State workforce dollars, local foundations, and employer partners.

**Connections:** The project will continue to provide training on DBT and C.A.V.E. to youth and staff from public and private organizations who work with youth involved with child welfare

<sup>3</sup> The YMCA Connections Program website (<http://www.ymca.org/yfs/residential-services/connections.html>) includes additional information about C.A.V.E.

## Employment Services

This section of the report includes information on the employment services activities implemented and conducted by two of the grantees in this cluster: the Adult Connections for Youth Emancipating From Foster Care (Adult Connections) project of Children’s Home + Aid Society of Illinois and the Works Wonders project of Foster Forward<sup>4</sup>. Individuals interviewed for this section of the report included the following:

- Yolanda Washburn, youth engagement specialist, Foster Forward (Works Wonders)
- Lisa Guillette, executive director, Foster Forward
- Elizabeth Mulkern, vocational specialist, Kaleidoscope (Adult Connections)
- Melissa Ludington, vice president of child welfare, Children’s Home + Aid Society
- Sonya Leathers, evaluator, University of Illinois at Chicago
- Catherine Heath, child and family program specialist, Children’s Bureau

## Need for Service

Youth in foster care generally receive independent living skills training to help prepare them to transition into the next stage of their lives. Youth are provided with information on how to apply for a job and may even receive interview skills training. Adult Connections and Works Wonders were designed to “meet youth where they are” and to prepare them, in some cases meeting with them one on one, for a job and the culture of employment.

**Adult Connections:** Project staff reported that Chicago has a significantly high rate of unemployment, and in many of the communities with the highest number of youth involved in child welfare, there are few employment options for unskilled or minimally skilled workers. Additionally, violence is prevalent throughout Chicago. Due to these factors, the mayor of Chicago wanted to increase youth employment in the city and developed a program called Find Your Future, which pairs youth with internships during the summer months. The program is open to all youth; however, it is advertised in particular communities and hires based on where the youth live. Staff reported that there has been some concern that the program has not reached the population that it was designed to reach. Youth involved in this program are often placed in internships with nonprofit agencies, including Children’s Home + Aid Society, the park district, child care centers, or summer camps. Staff reported that the internships generally do not lead to skill development and frequently do not turn into long-term employment for the youth. There is a small government-paid stipend connected to these internships. To meet the specific needs of youth in foster care and to improve the opportunities that may lead to full-time employment for youth involved with child welfare, Children’s Home + Aid Society developed the Adult Connections employment services project, which was based on the design of Find Your Future. Adult Connections works with youth to establish externships that build skills, open doors to full-time employment, and provide networking opportunities.

**Works Wonders:** Project staff reported that similar to Chicago, jobs for unskilled and minimally skilled workers are not readily available in Rhode Island. Job growth in the State has slowed, and the current economic growth opportunities being sought by the State are generally geared toward highly skilled workers.

<sup>4</sup> The two other grantees in this cluster—YMCA of San Diego County and the Clark County Department of Family Services—did not include an employment services aspect in their grants.

Foster Forward has an integrated service array that, through a contract with the State, serves youth ages 16–21 in foster care. This program also manages the Jim Casey Youth Initiative for the State, which serves youth in foster care and youth formerly in foster care from ages 14 through 24 years. Services provided by Foster Forward include the aftercare component for all 18- to 21-year-old individuals who have aged out of foster care.<sup>5</sup> The Children’s Bureau grant provided Foster Forward with the opportunity to support youth as they prepared to enter the workforce.

## Selection of Youth Participants

Adult Connections and Works Wonders both began as randomized control trials, randomly selecting the participants to whom they offered their services. However, early in the grant period Works Wonders moved to a formative evaluation process to determine if the program was feasible and appropriate, and to help increase the number of actual participants.

**Adult Connections:** Because foster care services in Chicago are privatized, children placed in the custody of the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) are served by private agencies, including the four private agencies that partnered for this grant: Children’s Home + Aid; UCAN; Kaleidoscope; and One Hope United.<sup>6</sup> The youth referred to the project were 17–21 years of age and received foster care services from one of the four partner agencies. These youth were also those with the greatest barriers to employment and were in need of either job skills training or mentoring. After both the youth and the caseworker completed an initial survey, the youth was randomly assigned to either the control group or experimental group.

<sup>5</sup> Youth in Rhode Island age out of foster care at age 18 years. However, if youth attend school, work full time, or some combination of the two, they can receive voluntary aftercare services. The youth are provided a maximum of \$600 in supplemental living support—based on the escalation of employment—that decreases over the 3 years they can receive aftercare. Youth can continue to receive the \$600 monthly if they remain in school the entire time. In addition, youth can receive between 6 and 8 hours of case management services monthly.

<sup>6</sup> The Illinois DCFS is also a partner in the Adult Connections grant.

**Works Wonders:** The project served youth and young adults ages 16–21 years in the first 4 years of the project, but that expanded to include youth ages 14 and 15 years in the last year of the project. At the onset of the project, each youth referred to the project completed an initial assessment. After completion of the assessment, youth were randomly assigned to either the control group or experimental group. However, the project coordinators quickly realized that they should open the pool to serve more youth, including those who expressed interest in participating in Works Wonders after their initial assessment but were not initially accepted.

## Training

Both projects offered employment preparation training to explore the current interests, skills, and possible long-term career goals of the youth participants. In addition, the training provided instruction on a number of different work-related topics to help the participants understand employment issues, which included but were not limited to, the following:

- Job applications
- Communication skills
- Job interviews
- Workers’ rights
- Financial literacy and budgeting

The curricula provided youth with information that empowered them to be aware of discriminatory work practices and to help normalize experiences (e.g., job interviews) through role play. Each project had a specialist that worked with the young people to determine their interests and long-term career goals. Both projects had donors who provided new and used clothing to ensure youth would have professional clothing for job interviews and to wear to work.

**Adult Connections:** Initially, youth participating in the Adult Connections employment program attended group classes that included a 40-hour curriculum of 10 work-related modules prior to beginning their externships. However, due to the low enrollment of youth into the program, the classes were changed to one-on-one engagement with the vocational specialist. Youth and the vocational specialist worked through the modules at the youth's convenience and at a pace and a level comfortable for the youth. Prior to beginning the modules, youth would take a pretest to assess their knowledge. Once the youth completed the 10 modules, they would take a posttest to determine what they had learned and to determine if they were ready to begin placement in an externship. In some cases, youth would need to spend extra time building skills.

**Works Wonders:** Works Wonders employment preparation classes were built around a peer-based participatory model called Empowerment and Employment clubs (E-Squared clubs). The cohort of youth in each group remained the same throughout the 16-module course. There was time during each session for youth to reflect on what they had learned from the module as well as in previous employment experiences. In addition, the youth worked with peers to address negative behaviors. The goal of this exercise was to try to harness the power of peer support on reinforcing behavior change that would help youth develop the relational competencies they would need to be successful in their work environments and also be empowered in decision-making and self-regulation.

In addition to the E-Squared clubs, Works Wonders had an employment specialist who met one on one with youth to operationalize concepts and skills they had learned in class. For example, when youth learned about developing a resume, the employment specialist would ask the youth questions about their resumes.

Works Wonders conducted initial assessments with all youth participants. One aspect of the assessment explored what youth perceived to be some of their barriers to employment. Over 60 percent of the youth identified a mental health concern they had for themselves as being a potential barrier to employment. However, this number was significantly lower in data from the follow-up surveys conducted at the completion of the E-Squared clubs.<sup>7</sup>

## Employer Partners

Both projects partnered with local and national companies and organizations. The projects did not initially consider providing an orientation to employer partners. At first, Adult Connections provided the partners with a list of frequently asked questions. However, after working with one manager who understood the effects of trauma and taught her staff to recognize and understand trauma, project staff realized regular conversations with the employers were needed to educate them about the effects of trauma. These conversations assisted some employers with understanding how to better support youth placed with their companies.

## Internships, Externships, and Work Experiences

Both projects provided youth with assistance in job placement through an externship, internship, or job shadow<sup>8</sup> with companies that partnered with the grantee. In some instances, the grantee would work with the youth to locate a work experience opportunity that met their skills and interests, with a company not yet in partnership with the grantee.

<sup>7</sup> The exact percentage was not available at the time of the site visit but will be included in the final grant evaluation report.

<sup>8</sup> In job shadowing, a business allows the youth to see what it is like to perform a certain type of work by accompanying an experienced worker as they perform the job.

The projects determined that a few assets, such as having a high school diploma or a general educational development diploma, contributed to youth being successful in their job placements. Project staff also reported that youth who were self-motivated and self-determined were more likely to be successful. Communication skills were another key to success. Youth tended to be more successful if they were able to effectively communicate about events occurring in their lives that might affect their work performance, such as if their basic needs were being met. The projects included issues such as empowerment and building relationships as part of their curricula so the youth would feel more comfortable speaking up for themselves.

**Adult Connections:** When youth completed the training modules, they would be placed in an externship with a company partner, or Adult Connections would assist the youth in finding another employer that would better suit their needs or interests.

Each externship with partner companies was for 300 hours. Generally, the companies paid the youth directly for their work, and the project reimbursed the employer. This varied, however, based on the partnership agreements.

When youth were granted an interview for an externship, Adult Connections staff would discuss with them how they would travel to the interview, including the mode of transportation and the transportation routes. Youth had access to bus and rail passes through their foster placement agencies. In addition, subsidized child care was available to youth with children if they were working or in school part time. However, child care was not available in all communities nor was it always available at the times needed by youth working nontraditional hours.

Some of the jobs youth were placed in required more skills than others. The Children's Home + Aid Society had an extern placed in its information technology department working in its computer lab. The extern had the skillset necessary to perform this type of work. At the end of the externship, he was hired by the agency and, as of the site visit, had been employed with the Children's Home + Aid Society for 2 years.

For the most part, when there were issues with job performance, the employers addressed the issues with the youth with the support of project staff. Throughout the youth's externship, Adult Connections' staff conducted site visits to observe the youth perform their jobs, offer feedback as needed, and review job performance with the employer. In addition, Adult Connections' staff were available to meet with the youth or the employer to discuss any other issues related to the externships. Youth often contacted Adult Connections staff to discuss issues not related to their externships, including, but not limited to, housing, workplace, financial, and personal issues.

At the completion of the 300 hours, Adult Connections conducted evaluations to determine how successful the externship had been and inquired of the employer if the youth was someone it would want to employ on a regular basis. Many youth remained in their positions after the externships ended, and many of those remained in their positions throughout the grant period. In other instances, Adult Connections assisted youth in a job search to find independent employment.

**Works Wonders:** The goal of the project was to ensure that every youth enrolled in the program had at least one work experience—job shadow, internship, or an actual job placement. In some cases, the internship led to a job placement.

Works Wonders was able to obtain additional funding from the Governor's Workforce Board's Workforce Innovation Grant (<http://www.gwb.ri.gov/enewsGrantees.htm>) to provide stipends to youth participating in an unpaid job shadow or internship. The program stipulated that if an employment partner ultimately hired a youth they took on through this project, and if the young person worked more than 60 hours and up to 400 hours, the employer could apply to the State to be reimbursed for 50 percent of the first year's wages. If the youth worked more than 400 hours, the company could apply to be reimbursed for up to 25 percent of the first year's wages. Through this incentive, Works Wonders was able to cultivate a number of employer partners.

Rhode Island does not have the same mass transportation system as Chicago, but throughout the life of the grant, Works Wonders had funding from another grant that allowed them to provide bus passes and child care to youth in need.

## Evaluation

Although the projects were not yet prepared to report any definitive findings at the time of the site visit, the processes in place to measure the success of the projects were discussed.<sup>9</sup>

**Adult Connections:** In addition to the pre- and posttests that were a part of the youths' training, the evaluation design included interviews with youth and their caseworkers every 9–12 months. The youth were asked questions about their prior work history, success with maintaining employment, and why they left their previous jobs. The evaluation also included an assessment of factors associated with employment attainment and outcomes, including substance use, depression, educational attainment, and social support. The evaluation provided an assessment of the effect of the intervention on barriers to successful entry into the job market and to maintaining employment. The evaluators conducted job-readiness assessments with each youth and assessments with caseworkers that allowed the caseworkers to have input into whether the youth was ready for employment and what the barriers to the youth's success might be. In addition, there was a qualitative component that allowed the staff and the evaluators to witness and report on the growth of the youth participating in the project. The project evaluation also included interviews with the employers. One of the successes reported by Adult Connections was that two different employers asked for more youth to be placed with them after other youth had successfully completed their externships.

**Works Wonders:** The evaluation consisted of pre- and postassessments of the motivation and empowerment of youth. At the beginning of the grant period, the evaluator (the Workplace Center at Columbia University) looked at how the project would measure empowerment and developed assessment tools to assess the level of support that youth had within the workforce setting and across other domains in their lives. They also looked at relational competencies using ecomapping and other means to assess the extent to which relationships were strengthened over time for youth participating in the program. One of the project's long-term goals was that youth would sustain employment for more than 6 months. Therefore, the evaluation collected data on whether youth had been hired and the duration of their employment.

The project noted several successes youth experienced as part of the project, including being hired at the end of their work experiences, exploring and experiencing several different career areas, and being glad they had multiple experiences because it allowed them to see what they did not want to do.

## Sustainability

Both projects believed that they would be able to sustain some or all of the aspects of their current employment programs through other funding sources and State mandates. Both States have programs designed to provide employment training to youth in foster care. However, staff noted that the current state programs were not designed to meet the needs of those youth with the greatest barriers to employment, as their grant projects were designed to do. They believe their grant projects are meeting these needs and would like to continue them when their grants end.

<sup>9</sup> The grantee final reports will include project evaluation results. The grantee final reports, once submitted, will be available in the Children's Bureau Discretionary Grants Library at <https://library.childwelfare.gov/cbarants/ws/librarv/docs/cbarants/GrantHome>.



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