

CHILD WELLBEING PROJECT

Catawba County Social Services

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

www.catawbacountync.gov/dss/PW/ChildWellbeing.asp

AT-A-GLANCE

Initiative Start Date:
2010

Initiative Location:



Area Served:
Catawba County, NC

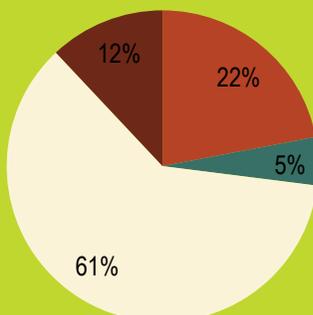
Initiative Budget:
\$483,887

Age Range of Youth:
15 – 21 years old

Number of Youth Served:
40 annually

Diversity of Youth Served:

- Black/African American
- Latino/Hispanic
- White/Caucasian
- Other/Unknown



ABOUT

The Child Wellbeing Project focuses on an often neglected part of the child welfare continuum: post-care services. Dawn Wilson, the project manager explains, “In our experience, addressing safety and permanence did not necessarily equal well-being. Well-being and thriving were getting lost. What could we do differently to address this? We recognized that post-permanency services were few and far between.” The Child Wellbeing Project offers an array of completely voluntary services to families with children who are exiting care through reunification, adoption, custody or guardianship. The project is operated by the county’s public social service agency with support from The Duke Endowment. Its goals are to improve outcomes related to education, employment, stable housing, connection to family and community, access to health and mental health care and wise life choices (avoiding substance abuse, unwanted pregnancies and criminal activity).

KEY ACTIVITIES

- **Success Coaches** – are linchpins of the project, available 24/7; engage and partner with families to assess needs, set goals, coordinate services, prevent or intervene in crises and build skills.
- **Educational Advocacy** – coordinate closely with public schools to ensure continuity and achievement.
- **Post-care Clinical Services** – offer support groups, individual or family therapy to address past losses, trauma and other issues that can interfere with permanent families’ success.

HIGHLIGHT

One of Youth Thrive sites visitors said, “I felt like I wanted to bottle up the organization’s group culture and replicate it with our own staff. Their ability, camaraderie, authentic intelligence and respect for each other were inspiring to watch. It is clear the people – from the administrative assistant to the supervisor to the funder – have a lot to do with why the program participants respond so well.”

This is high praise for any organization but particularly noteworthy for a public agency. Public agencies often face challenges that can make it hard to nurture a creative culture. To foster this climate, the project pays close attention to staff selection, training, coaching and ongoing support. Staff have the opportunity to learn, rehearse, demonstrate and get feedback on needed skills, and supervisors use these opportunities to assure fidelity to the model.

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YOUTH THRIVE™

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Youth Thrive is a research-informed framework developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) that identifies five protective and promotive factors for youth (age 11-26):

- Youth Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Adolescent Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence

The goal of Youth Thrive is to increase the likelihood that all youth are supported in ways that advance healthy development and well-being and reduce the impact of negative life experiences. Youth Thrive focuses particularly on vulnerable youth, beginning with those involved in the child welfare system.

CSSP conducted a national search to identify initiatives that provide compelling examples of programs and policy efforts that build the five protective and promotive factors for youth in the child welfare system. This is a profile of one of the 15 selected exemplary initiatives.

BUILDING THE PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

The exemplary initiatives address all or most of the protective and promotive factors. Here are several examples:

Youth Resilience: The Child Wellbeing Project uses a framework explicitly based on resilience theory, defined as “the ability to adapt to extraordinary circumstances, achieving positive outcomes in the face of adversity” (Fraser & Richman, 1999). Success coaches work to reduce risk factors (e.g., future maltreatment, reentry into care) and increase protective factors (e.g., self-sufficiency, parenting skills, educational achievement,) in order to have a positive long-term impact on post-permanency stability and child well-being.

Social Connections: Premised on values of empathy, genuineness and respect for families’ belief systems and culture, Success Coaches assist families in building a positive support network, including community and natural supports, as the best and first resources for families.

USING DATA

The Child Wellbeing Project uses a multi-faceted approach to evaluation, partnering with external evaluation experts. From the start, success coach services were based on a review of evidence-based and evidence-informed practices. Over the past three years, the Project conducted a process evaluation to assess service implementation and assure fidelity to the model. The Project:

- Uses a series of measures to assess family and child functioning initially and to gauge progress at six month intervals.
- Set up a database to track additional outcomes including subsequent child protective services reports and re-entry into foster care.
- Holds monthly meetings to review program data and to ensure that milestones are met for recruitment, retention, assessments and interventions as well as to address systems issues.
- Solicits qualitative feedback on services via focus groups with parents twice a year.

The Project completed a process and outcomes evaluation of the pilot phase. Data indicates that success coach services are a stabilizing influence on families with 97.4% maintaining permanence, compared to 95.2% of families who decline services, and are achieving positive outcomes for children.