

**AT-A-GLANCE**

**Initiative Start Date:**  
2012

**Initiative Location:**



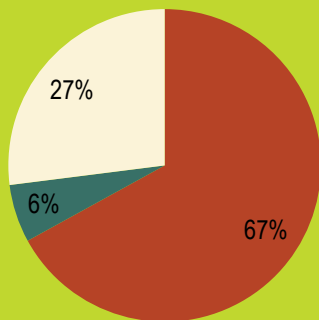
**Initiative Budget:**  
\$25,000

**Age Range of Youth:**  
13 – 17 years old

**Number of Youth Served:**  
25 annually

**Diversity of Youth Served:**

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



**ABOUT**

At Just Like Me, a three-week cultural arts and education summer camp, youth are given complete creative license to follow their interest and write, sing, dance, paint or make videos that tell their own stories. Just Like Me was designed for youth involved in the foster care system to help them develop their artistic talents and gain skills such as trust, teamwork, problem solving and decision-making. The camp was established by Family Support Services of Northern Florida, Inc., a large child welfare agency, to fill a gap for older teens, as many summer programs focus on younger children or are sports related. Just Like Me intentionally serves the highest risk youth (e.g., kicked out of placements, victims of human trafficking, mental health or substance abuse problems) who may not have the opportunity to participate in other enrichment activities. Mental health counselors are available to help youth with any issues that surface during the creative process. Each young artist leaves with a product of their work and participates in a culminating performance for an enthusiastic audience of family, foster parents, staff, media and community members.

**KEY ACTIVITIES**

- **Artistic and Creative Skill Development** – participate in drama, dance, singing, songwriting, rap, spoken word, creative writing, photography and visual arts classes led by professional artists.
- **School and Career Preparation** – gain information about future education and career opportunities that use artistic and creative talents.
- **Finished Product and Performance** – complete projects (e.g., art piece, CD or DVD) to take home and archived on Just Like Me website; *Exhibition of Talent* showcase at local theater.

**HIGHLIGHT**

Scuba diving. That’s where the idea of Just Like Me was born. Specifically at Splash, a Florida summer camp and certification program available for youth in foster care. But the agency leadership realized that not all youth are ready for such a demanding underwater experience, plus air travel and four nights away from home. “No matter what their past issues or behavior concerns, we wanted to offer these young people a chance to have a creative experience and to express who they have been, who they are and who they want to become. We want to give them a chance to bond with others and realize they are not alone” says Brenda Stewart, camp co-founder.

**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:** Through creative expression, Just Like Me helps youth in foster care recognize and capitalize on their strengths, acknowledge their challenges, manage adversity and heal from the effects of trauma. Through intensive team-building activities, the youth increase their self-esteem and practice and improve their communication and conflict resolution skills.

**Social Connections:** Participants gain new social networks — of mentors, artists and peers—that help youth develop a sense of connectedness, greater self-confidence and personal responsibility. Many camp participants maintain relationships with artists, agency staff and other participants and return to participate in activities throughout the year.

## **USING DATA**

Family Support Services of Northern Florida, Inc. tracks the outcomes of Just Like Me through their Independent Living Program. Just Like Me is also evaluated by the Florida Safe Families Network. Data will be collected until program participants reach the age of 23. The key indicators are:

- 1) satisfactory educational progress.
- 2) no conviction for theft, drug, or violent assault offenses.
- 3) no teenage pregnancy.

Success is defined as when Just Like Me alum reach these benchmarks at higher percentages than a cohort of youth in foster care who did not participate in the program.

The 12-month outcome data for the 2012 alum of Just Like Me is:

- 86% High school diploma or equivalency.
- 87% No juvenile or adult criminal involvement.
- 93% Not pregnant or parenting.