

## MAAC/EmpowerMEnt

[www.maac4kids.org](http://www.maac4kids.org)

### AT-A-GLANCE

**Initiative Start Date:**  
1996

**Initiative Location:** Statewide



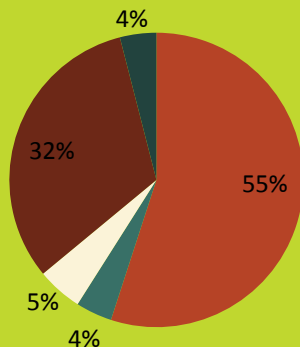
**Initiative Budget:**  
\$2.9 million MAAC  
\$300,000 EmpowerMEnt

**Age Range of Youth:**  
6 - 20 years old

**Number of Youth Served:**  
886 annually

**Diversity of Youth Served:**

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



### ABOUT

Collaboration is one of those good ideas that is hard to do well and tough to sustain. MAAC, the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children, is a compelling example that aims to provide seamless access to services for youth in foster care. Established in 1996 and still going strong, MAAC is a consortium of nine agencies that serves youth referred by the child welfare or juvenile justice system, many of whom have been labeled “seriously emotionally disturbed” or “hard to place.” MAAC’s goals are to keep youth in the least restrictive setting possible, avoid placement disruptions and provide individualized services that youth need to reach their highest potential. Part of its collaborative includes EmpowerMEnt, an advocacy group formed by youth for youth to improve the child welfare system. EmpowerMEnt’s motto is: “Nothing About Me Without Me.” MAAC also houses the Georgia Youth Opportunities Initiative, one of 15 states supported by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative to achieve positive outcomes for youth involved in the child welfare system.

### KEY ACTIVITIES

- **High Fidelity Wraparound** – provide placement, support, respite and other services customized to meet needs of individual families; services are in-home and community-based; driven by decisions made by families and youth; evidence-based practice.
- **Youth Support Services Program** – match youth who have transitioned out of foster care with youth currently in care to help prepare them for adulthood; ensure they have needed life skills and can accomplish their education and occupational goals.
- **Teen Parent Connection** – support teen mothers and fathers in foster care through a statewide network of programs that make available a broad array of services including life coaches who have specialized training to help youth succeed as parents and as adults.

### HIGHLIGHT

In addition to its unique structure, relationships are key to MAAC/EmpowerMEnt’s approach. Youth have a lot to say about staff, including: “loveable,” “stayed with me through thick and thin” and “I know I can count on them.” Youth shared stories that ranged from the routine (support to attend a national conference) to the profound (helping a young person grapple with the decision to have her leg amputated due to medical issues) to the complex (convincing parents to overcome their concerns about past mental health issues and support a young person’s decision to attend college). MAAC/EmpowerMEnt uses its experience

**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.

learned from working with youth and families to advocate for systemic change. For example, for its teen parents in foster care, it challenged the state's definition that the foster parent is the baby's "official parent" and insisted that designation go to the youth.

### **BUILDING THE PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS**

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

**Concrete Support in Times of Need:** MAAC/EmpowerMENT's structure eliminates obstacles to obtaining resources, services and treatment for youth in foster care. Coordination among agencies reduces duplication of services and makes it easier for youth and families to navigate the social services, health, mental health, education and legal systems.

**Social-Emotional Competence:** Youth have opportunities for productive decision-making and constructive engagement in their family, community, school and other social institutions and through these activities develop self-regulation, self-reflection, self-confidence, self-compassion and other character strengths.

### **USING DATA**

MAAC/EmpowerMENT staff and board have recently reviewed their evaluation system and are developing a revised data collection and analysis system that will encompass specific youth, program and process indicators. EmpowerMENT tracks participation in trainings and events, participation in Individual Development Account (IDA) savings programs and goals achieved by the youth board. For example, 321 youth have IDAs. In 2013, data for MAAC's residential services included:

- 380 youth served; almost all had at least one mental health diagnosis.
- 21% were admitted into a treatment facility, in keeping with goal of having youth in the least restrictive, safe placement.
- 80% of youth with a transfer moved to a less restrictive placement.
- 43% left services for permanent placements, including a return to family, adoption or emancipation.