

# MY LIFE PROJECT

Portland State University

<http://www.pdx.edu/profile/my-life>

# YOUTH THRIVE™

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

## AT-A-GLANCE

**Initiative Start Date:**  
2010

**Initiative Location:**



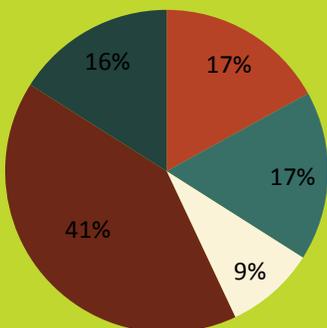
**Initiative Budget:**  
\$675,000

**Age Range of Youth:**  
16-19 years old

**Number of Youth Served:**  
100 annually

**Diversity of Youth Served:**

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



## ABOUT

As their name indicates, the My Life Project uses the principle of self-determination to help young people learn how to direct their own lives and achieve their goals. The My Life Project works with youth preparing to exit foster care, including the large percentage of youth in foster care with disabilities, who may face greater challenges in transitioning to independent living. Coaches help youth set goals, solve problems, rehearse strategies, take action and request help. In addition to its direct work with youth, the My Life Project is testing the efficacy of its model using a randomized, longitudinal, experimental research design.

“Adults in these young peoples’ lives often have their best interest at heart but have a lot of ideas about what youth should be doing,” says Laurie Powers, one of the investigators on the My Life Project, “There are few opportunities for youth to take control of their *own* lives. If we want to prepare youth for independent living, they have to experience making change for themselves.”

## KEY ACTIVITIES

- **Coaching** – meet weekly with youth in 60-90 minute sessions; help youth articulate their dreams, identify steps they can take and support needed from others to reach goals; provide opportunities to practice strategies; celebrate successes. Materials available in audio format for youth who have difficulty reading or prefer listening.
- **Mentoring** – participate in workshops led by young adults previously in foster care; address topics such as going to college, exploring career options, and reconnecting with family members after emancipation.

## HIGHLIGHT

“The agency culture is everything I would have wanted when I was in an independent living program,” said a young adult who visited My Life with Youth Thrive. “There is love, adults who really care, compassion, respect and a lot of tears of joy from everyone.” Coaches use a structured curriculum and self-help guide to introduce strategies based on each youth’s current situation. For example, a youth in crisis would be exposed to problem-solving skills to handle immediate concerns and later move to goal setting. Even when youth express interest in high risk or problematic behaviors, coaches listen and work through those goals rather than judging or dismissing them as inappropriate.

Center  
for the  
Study  
of  
Social  
Policy

**Youth Thrive** is a research-informed framework developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy 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:** With its emphasis on problem solving and goal achievement, the My Life Project helps youth build the resiliency needed to make a successful transition into adulthood. Youth learn to establish partnerships with adult allies and how to work with professionals (caseworkers, teachers, attorneys).

**Knowledge of Adolescent Development:** The My Life Project supports youth in forging their own unique identity, a key developmental task.

### **USING DATA**

The My Life Project emphasizes the importance of a structured but flexible approach to guide replication and careful attention to fidelity of implementation. It measures positive and problematic outcomes and assesses if positive results are sustained over time. The efficacy of the My Life Project is being evaluated through a randomized trial. Approximately 300 youth in foster care are enrolled in the study and are randomly assigned to either foster care as usual or the My Life intervention. A full battery of assessments, consisting of more than 40 measures, is administered to youth in three major waves: baseline (first month), end of intervention (12 months later) and follow-up (24 months later). In addition, youth are contacted every 60 days for brief telephone interviews. My Life is also completing six in-depth case studies to assess contextual variables and gather descriptive information. Results from the trial will be available in two years.

A prior randomized study with a sample of 69 youth was conducted on the TAKE CHARGE model, the intervention on which the My Life Project is based. TAKE CHARGE serves youth in both foster care and special education. Published in 2012, the evaluation found moderate to large effects post-intervention and one year follow-up for positive differences in self-determination, quality of life and utilization of community transition services for youth who received TAKE CHARGE. Youth in the intervention group also completed high school, were employed and carried out independent living activities at notably higher rates than the comparison group.