



Youth Acceptance Project

“I can see it brings the family back together. Even though they still live together, they're separated by all these feelings and all this grief and emotions and fear, and [YAP] just brings them back to loving each other and remembering ‘This is still my child.’” YAP provider

Overview:

Family Builders’ **Youth Acceptance Project (YAP)** is an intervention for working with the families of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ+) children and youth in, or at risk of entering, foster care. The intervention serves as a family preservation and family reunification tool, assisting families who are struggling with the sexual orientation, gender identity or expression (SOGIE) of their child. YAP social workers use a trauma-informed, psycho-educational model steeped in cultural humility to address the misinformation, resistance, fear, grief, and guilt that families often struggle with when they learn that their child is LGBTQ+.

LGBTQ+ children and youth are among the most vulnerable, overrepresented populations in foster care. Family rejection of a child’s sexual orientation, gender identity and expression is a significant contributing factor to the disproportionate number of LGBTQ+ youth in child welfare (over 30%) and juvenile justice systems. In contrast, parental affirmation is a great protective factor for LGBTQ+ youth; **teens who perceive parental support regarding their gender identity are 93% less likely to attempt suicide.**¹

The Youth Acceptance Project social worker meets the family where they are at, without judgement and provides a safe space for families to process their feelings around issues related to their youth’s SOGIE, away from their child. The therapeutic-style support and advocacy that YAP social workers provide allow the family to learn, grow and become the affirming and advocating caregivers that their LGBTQ+ children need them to be. Importantly, the model is responsive to each family’s experiences within their own culture, religion, and race. The intervention reduces the time that children spend in foster care, reunites children with their families, and in many cases, prevents separation in the first place.

Evaluation

Ceres Policy Research conducted an evaluation of YAP. Ceres designed and completed a program evaluation that included surveys and interviews, and data from a tool created by Family Builders which measures the level of acceptance a caregiver has for their child. There were an unexpectedly high number of statistically significant promising findings for both the youth and families. The following outcomes were taken directly from the evaluation.

Caregivers showed significant improvement in caregivers’ support and affirmation of their LGBTQ+ children. These can be broken into four categories:

1. Reductions in emotional reactivity while processing their feelings about their child’s SOGIE.
2. Improvements in the way that family faith and values don’t have to dissipate to show support for their LGBTQ+ youth.
3. Improvements in caregivers’ affirming behaviors such as using their child’s chosen name and pronouns, understanding of their child’s identity, using respectful language, affirming youth gender expression, and most importantly clearly communicating how much they love their child.
4. Improvements in caregivers’ support of affirming medical interventions.

The youth surveys showed statistically significant improvements related to LGBTQ+ youth self-esteem, reductions in self-harm, and improvements in caregivers’ affirming behaviors.

The evaluation’s analysis shows that YAP leads to significant improvements in LGBTQ+ youth self-esteem, feelings of safety at home and at school, caregivers affirming behavior and comfort with affirming medical care and how caregivers can use their faith and culture to support their LGBTQ+ children.

¹ Travers, R, Bauer, G, Pyne, J, Bradley, K, Gale, L, Papdimitriou, M. *Impacts of Strong Parental Support on Trans Youth: A report prepared for Children’s Aid Society of Toronto and Delisle Youth Services.* TransPULSE.