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Fostering Hope Program Evaluation Report

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	1
Table of Contents	2
Executive Summary.....	3
Findings Summary	3
Introduction	6
Methods	8
Secondary Data Analysis	10
Focus Groups and Interviews	11
Results.....	12
Fostering Hope Overview	8
Staff Perspectives on the Organization.....	12
Work with Families	12
Impact on Families.....	15
Work with Youth.....	17
Value of FH from Youth Perspective.....	19
Volunteering for Fostering Hope.....	21
The Call to Service for Volunteers.....	22
Summary and Recommendations	23
Recommendations.....	23



Executive Summary

Fostering Hope Foundation (Fostering Hope or FH) occupies a unique space in the community of service providers for foster families and current/former foster youth. Rather than providing direct services, they provide teams of volunteers who become part of families' and youths' support systems. Fostering Hope was first established in 2006 as a pilot program in Colorado Springs. FH continues to serve El Paso County and now includes the *Core Program* for foster families and *Fostering Adulthood* and *Teen Internship* programs for current and/or former foster youth. Their service goals are to provide **Stability, Enrichment, and Connections** as ways to translate the principles of Trauma-Informed Care into the relationships among foster families and youth in their care. *Stability, Enrichment, and Connections* are also how FH codes activities with families and youth into Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to track how (the type of activity) volunteers and coordinators spend time with the families and youth.

Since 2006, they have served 148 foster and kinship families with 883 foster children through the *Core Program*, providing practical supports (e.g., meals, transportation, housing) and emotional supports (via relationships built with FH staff, volunteers, and mentors). Since 2018, they have engaged with 25 youth in the *Fostering Adulthood* program. Fostering Hope has also worked with 55 faith organizations overall and trained 78 teams of volunteers and a total of 774 volunteers as of December 2021.

To strengthen their work and plan for scalability of programs, FH, engaged the Butler Institute for Families (Butler) to evaluate their supports to families, youth, and the volunteers that work with them. This mixed-methods evaluation consisted of an exhaustive review of FH's administrative tracking data, as well as new data collected via interviews and focus groups with 9 foster parents, 4 youths, 21 volunteers, and 5 staff members. FH administrative data was pulled for a two-year time period, from 2020 through 2021, for analysis. Qualitative data collection and analyses were conducted from August 2021 through February 2022.

Findings Summary

Findings from the program evaluation were organized around four areas: organizational overview, work with families, work with youth, and volunteering for Fostering Hope. Key findings from each of those areas include:

Work with Families

- When asked about the impact that Fostering Hope's volunteer supports and services, two themes emerged from family members' responses: 1) giving time back to marriages and families, and 2) providing encouragement and support. Fostering Hope provided foster parents with time and space to have experiences beyond being a foster parent, which rejuvenated them for their families.

- Most family activities during this time period of administrative data tracking (2020 through 2021) occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, so the most frequent activity conducted with families was providing meals, followed by childcare activities (such as babysitting or taking children out of the home for an activity), and transportation. Families take lead in deciding the supports they need and the FH coordinator and volunteers follow through on arranging those activities.
- Meals, childcare, and transportation were all categorized into the Stability category. Approximately 80% of family activities were categorized into Stability, thus building resiliency into the foster families by providing time, resources, and space to focus on their family relationships. Around 12% of activities contributed to the Enrichment KPI with families.

Work with Former Foster Youth

- Most often, youth were engaged in activities in the *Connection* category, such as relationship-building activities (“hanging out”) and community-building activities (such as the monthly gatherings held by FH). These Connection activities help support youths’ development into self-sufficient, or independent, adulthood.
- When staff rated youth on progress across independent life areas, the need areas were often around Finance and Relationship with Mentors/Volunteers. Generally, youth received higher ratings on Self-Care, Social/Recreation, and Medical/Dental Health, indicating that, on average, youth were moving closer towards being self-sufficient or independent in these areas.
- Overall, youth spoke warmly about their relationships with FH staff and volunteers. Youth valued this support system for giving them consistent relationships and allowing them to have a sense of family with people on whom they could rely.
- According to FH outcome data, 75% of *Fostering Adulthood* youth attained high school degrees. *Fostering Adulthood* youth reported more positive outcomes on education attainment, experience with homelessness, and high-risk behaviors as compared to other Colorado youth in transition (per the state’s report submitted to the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) with their data collected in 2018).

Volunteers

- Volunteers and staff indicated that they feel honored to do work that they do with families and youth. Volunteers, specifically, were inspired to give back by helping foster parents. They were led to volunteering through FH staff’s talks given at their churches, and they felt that the volunteer requirements were a good fit for their interests and availability.
- Volunteers felt supported in the teaming environment modeled by Fostering Hope’s staff. However, some expressed challenges due to the nature of the closeness of their relationships to foster families and youth (e.g., sympathizing with foster parents when a



foster child was reunited with family). Additionally, uncertain staff hours were described as being demanding or unpredictable, especially when being called in on Sundays for volunteer recruitment.

- Volunteers spoke about how volunteering was a call to service for them and gave them purpose. Some volunteers described feeling a duality within volunteering, in that they themselves benefited from their experiences and the relationships they built with families and youth as they were called to the service (of volunteering).

In summary, Fostering Hope operates through their mission to provide a caring community of supports that contribute to stable, connected, and enriched foster families and former foster youth. Strengths of Fostering Hope include being able to continue raising funds, building resource networks with churches, and increasing the number of foster families and youth that they are able to serve each year. Foster parents and youth value their relationships with volunteers and staff and recognize the impact that Fostering Hope has brought to their lives. Recommendations are offered from stakeholders and the Butler team around areas to continue strengthening their organizational (internal) efforts, communication and collaboration with other community organizations, supports to foster families and youth, and ongoing evaluation efforts.



Introduction

Fostering Hope Foundation (Fostering Hope or FH) is a nonprofit organization that provides services and supports to foster families and former foster youth by connecting them to volunteer teams who become part of families' and youths' support systems. Fostering Hope was established in 2006 in Colorado Springs and has grown to include their *Core Program* for foster families and *Fostering Adulthood* and *Teen Internship* programs for current and/or former foster youth. Their service goals are to provide **Stability**, **Enrichment**, and **Connections** to the foster children, youth, and families in their programs. These goals are grounded in extensive literature on promotive factors in childhood that support positive functioning in adulthood, including Narayan's Benevolent Childhood Experiences research which has found that having affirming and favorable childhood experiences can be helpful with positive long-term functioning following adversity.¹

Fostering Hope occupies a unique space in the community of service providers for foster families and current/former foster youth. Rather than providing direct services, they provide teams of volunteers who become part of families' and youths' support systems. Due to this, FH extensively screens and trains volunteers in order to best prepare them for working with families and youth, including preparing volunteers to follow the family's or youth's lead. Since 2006, they have served 148 foster and kinship families with 883 foster children through the *Core Program*. Since 2018, they have engaged with 25 youth in the *Fostering Adulthood* program. FH recruits from faith-based organizations and have worked with 55 churches in the past 14 years. They have trained 78 teams of volunteers, consisting of 774 individual volunteers, as of December 2021. Figures 1 and 2 show FH's model of support that they provide to families in their *Core Program* and to current/former foster youth in the *Fostering Adulthood* program.

¹ Narayan, Rivera, L. M., Bernstein, R. E., Harris, W. W., & Lieberman, A. F. (2018). Positive childhood experiences predict less psychopathology and stress in pregnant women with childhood adversity: A pilot study of the benevolent childhood experiences (BCEs) scale. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 78, 19–30. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.09.022>

Figure 1. Model of Support for Foster Families in *Core Program*

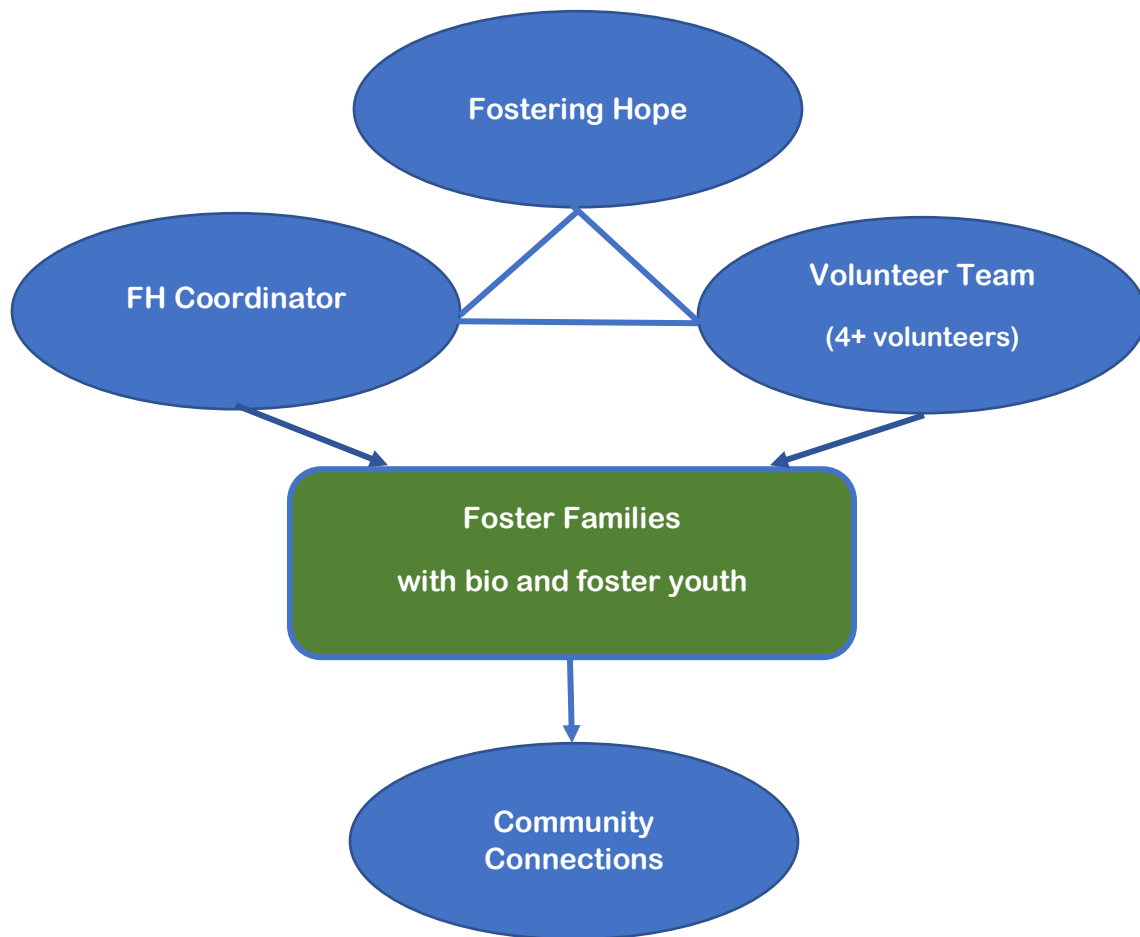
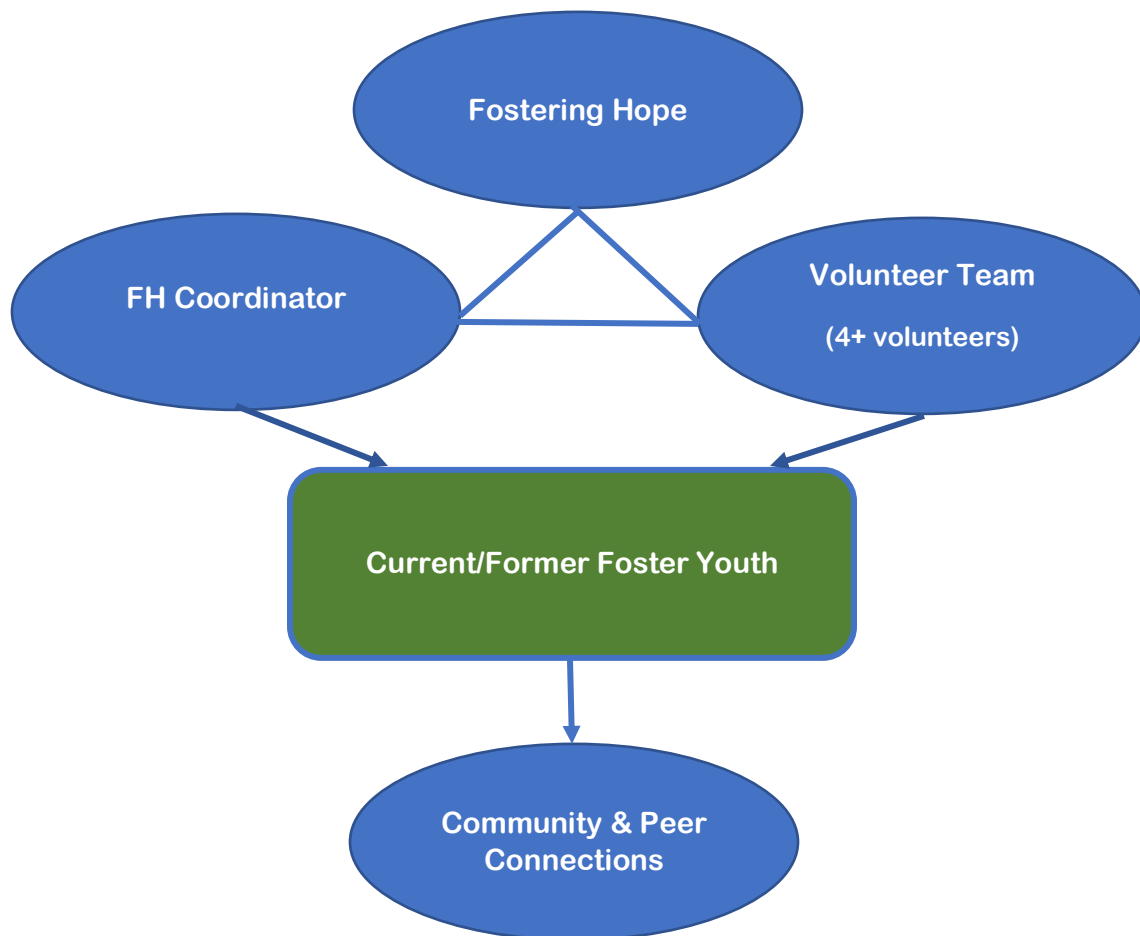


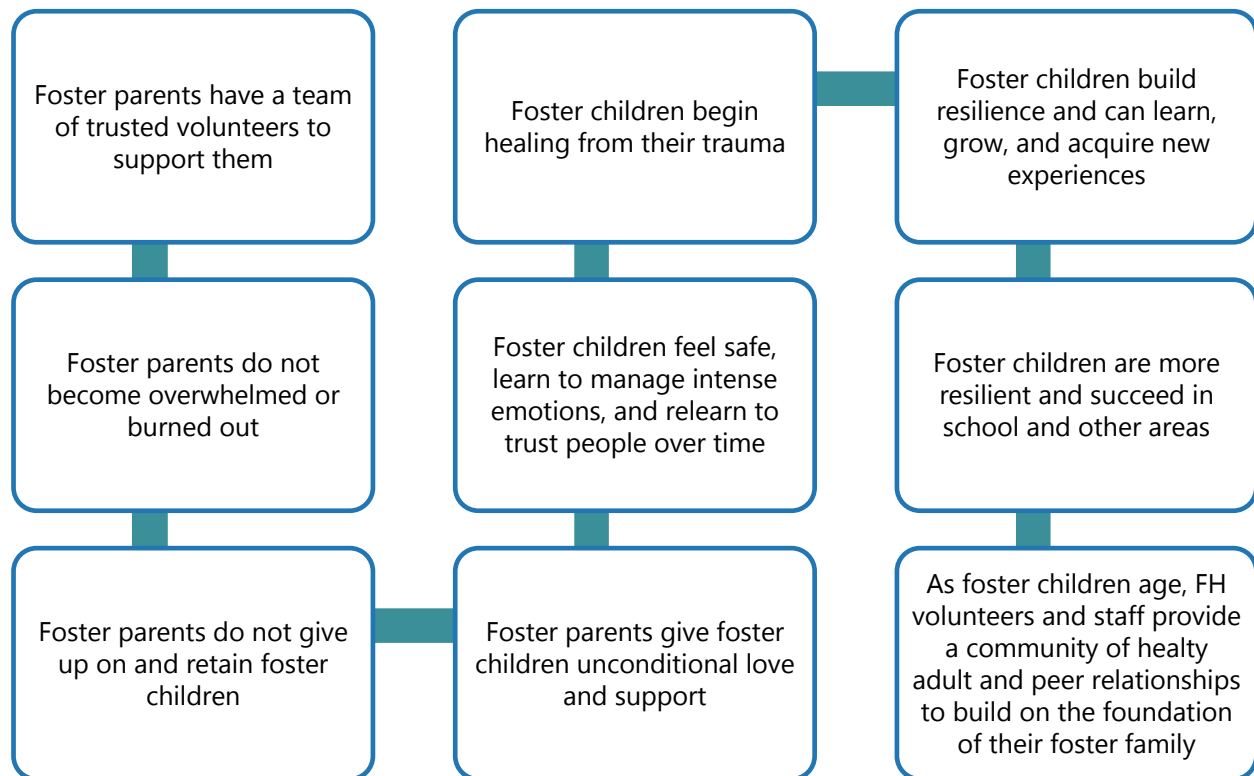
Figure 2. Model of Support for Current/Former Foster Youth in *Fostering Adulthood*



Fostering Hope Overview

FH has undergone organizational changes in the past several years, including: addressing staff turnover, continuing program expansion efforts, embracing trauma-informed practices with youth and families by embedding content into their volunteer training, and persisting through the COVID-19 pandemic. They have had a Social Return on Investment conducted, as well as a Theory of Change process, which is summarized in Figure below.

Figure 3. Fostering Hope Theory of Change



As of March 2022, FH has a fully staffed organization and are on track to rebuild to pre-pandemic number of families served as well as number of volunteer teams. In addition, as of April 2022, FH is in the process of strengthening the trauma-informed practices content in their *Fostering Adulthood* volunteer training model by adding the 8 Cs framework (calm, care, connect, communicate, conflict, cope, claim, and commit),² which provides a framework for each “C” area around:

- Important abilities for staff and volunteers that work with youth (e.g., for Care: knowledge and skill around showing persistence and patience and active listening skills, etc.)
- Tips towards critical opportunities to engage with youth (e.g., for Claim: being authentic, focus on individual interests/service plan, etc.), and
- Activities or planned coaching opportunities with youth (e.g., for Commit: perform the 5-Step Self Check-In, have values clarification, etc.)

² Hinkle, J. (2022). About the Workforce Institute’s 8 Cs. The Workforce Institute.
<https://theworkforceinstitute.com/>

Methods

Fostering Hope sought assistance in better understanding the impact of their services offered to foster parents and to youth who have aged out of foster care through their programs: *Core Program*, *Fostering Adulthood*, and *Teen Internship Partnership*. Butler conducted a program evaluation of Fostering Hope that included three components: a review of their existing program materials, secondary data analyses of program tracking information, and qualitative data collected via interviews and focus groups with families, former foster youth, volunteers, and staff coordinators. Program tracking information (FH administrative data) was pulled for a two-year time period, from 2020 through 2021. Data collection and analyses were conducted from August 2021 through February 2022.

Secondary Data Analysis

FH tracks *Core Program* families and *Fostering Adulthood* youth through various administrative data tracking methods. Key data points tracked include background/historical and demographics information for families and youths, activity tracking with families and youths, activity tracking with youths, and tracking/status updates for families, youths, and volunteers. The Butler team analyzed secondary data to answer questions related to activities with families and youth, the extent to which those activities related to FH's performance outcomes goals, and how performance outcome goals related amount of time receiving supports from FH. Matched population data from El Paso County were not available, so it was not possible to compare outcomes between cases who received FH services and those who did not. The Butler team also examined available program materials, documentation, guides, practices, and other related materials that guide FH's work. Key measures are described in **Error! Reference source not found.**Table 1.

Table 1. Measures used in secondary data analysis

Measure	Source
Demographics, background/historical information, and program status information for families and youths	FH administrative data
Program participation and status information for volunteers	FH administrative data
Number and types of activities with families and youths, grouped into FH performance outcomes goals	FH administrative data
Progress towards independence and goals (youth)	FH administrative data
Demographics and placement information for El Paso County	CDHS Community Performance Center website ³

³ Colorado Department of Human Services. (2022, February). *Data by topic*. CDHS Community Performance Center. <http://www.cdhsdatamatters.org/data-by-topic.html>



Focus Groups and Interviews

The Butler team conducted new data collection via online and in-person focus groups and interviews or via questions emailed to foster parents, former foster youth, volunteers (from Core Program and Fostering Adulthood), and FH staff coordinators. These data were collected from November 2021 through January 2022. In total, **9 foster parents, 4 youths, 21 volunteers, and 5 staff members participated in an interview, focus group, or submitted responses to emailed questions.** Volunteers received a \$20 gift card as incentive to participate and foster youths and parents received a \$30 gift card as an incentive, though many shared that they were happy for the opportunity to talk about their experiences with Fostering Hope without incentives. Qualitative data analysis was conducted using NVivo software and involved review of recording transcripts to identify themes.



Results

This report includes data from different administrative datasets and new data collected from interviews and focus groups. Results are organized into findings from staff perspectives, FH's work with families, FH's work with youth, and perspectives from Fostering Hope's volunteers.

Staff Perspectives

Throughout FH's phases of organizational change, the organization has remained committed to their values and mission to serve foster families and former foster youth, with the vision of strengthening their model in order to expand their services. One staff member stated, *"really focusing on what we continue to*

focus on like stability, enrichment and connection ... I think that that really is the true foundation of Fostering Hope and so I think that model definitely needs to stay the same and I think it could be very impactful in other areas if the model stays the same." Another staff member shared, *"I think the success rate of the organization over the last 15 years and the flexibility this gives volunteers mixing with churches, being able to come alongside and not part of the system, I think that's all extremely valuable and when it is clear, it seems to really work."*

Staff also discussed the positive work environment within FH that allowed for supporting their growth, learning, and dealing with the day-to-day challenges of the job. While

some staff shared mixed experiences with their on-the-job training, they agreed that, overall, there was a supportive environment for shared learning, particularly around group supervision. One staff member stated that *"group supervision helps out a lot and it gives us the time to all kind of bring ideas to one another and just wrap around each other and support each other in different ways where we all may be stuck."* Another staff member shared, *"we can learn from each other. I know I personally am comfortable calling anyone in the organization and asking for help and feel as if I would be answered; everyone would help and nobody would think poorly of me that*



A foster parent told us that these people (volunteers) help without getting paid and her teens can see that. It shows them that someone cares about them and does not expect anything in return ... The team and family become friends and extended family members. This is quite unique."



I had to ask” and another staff member stated that “if there is a social-emotional need, the team (staff) is good at expressing empathy and providing comforting words and prayer.”

An area of challenge that staff identified was the sometimes erratic schedule they have when working with the families, youth, and churches. When working with churches, coordinators understood the need for recruitment, but they felt a different approach could be taken to better spread staff around to visit different churches in the area on different weekends. In general, staff appreciated their flexible hours. However, working with families’ and youths’ needs at all hours and the volunteer recruitment “season” took time that staff could spend with their families and they would have appreciated better acknowledgement and support at that time.

Work with Families

Fostering Hope’s administrative data tracked activities with 40 families from 2020 through February 2021, with a total of 1,493 activities recorded during this time. Findings indicated that each family had at least one type of activity with their volunteer team and/or coordinator that lasted about two hours each. Cumulatively over this period of time, volunteers held an average of 37.33 activities, or an average of 74.21 hours, per family across 40 families. Childcare and outings tended to take longer compared to other activities (they usually took three or more hours). Meanwhile, the most common type of activity for families during this time period was meals (40% of activities reported), followed by childcare (16%) and transportation (15%); see Figure 2. Families had been receiving services from FH from less than one year up to 14 years, with the average at about 3.5 years.

Each activity is also categorized into a type of Key Performance Indicator (KPI). KPI types are: Connection, Enrichment, Stability, Team Development, and Other. KPIs are based on best trauma-informed practices for building resilient families. Stability for families is a key area for providers, such as Fostering Hope, to support families in building their resilience by reducing stressors, increase access to resources, and support development of coping strategies.⁴

As seen in the FH data, stability was the most often-reported type of KPI, at 80.1%. Next was Enrichment at 12.4%, followed by Connection at 5.7% (see Figure 3). There were significant correlations between reported KPIs, with Enrichment activities positively related to Connection and to Stability activities.

⁴ Vogel, J. M. & the Family Systems Collaborative Group. (2017). *Family Resilience and Traumatic Stress: A Guide for Mental Health Providers*. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

Figure 1. Types of Activities with Families

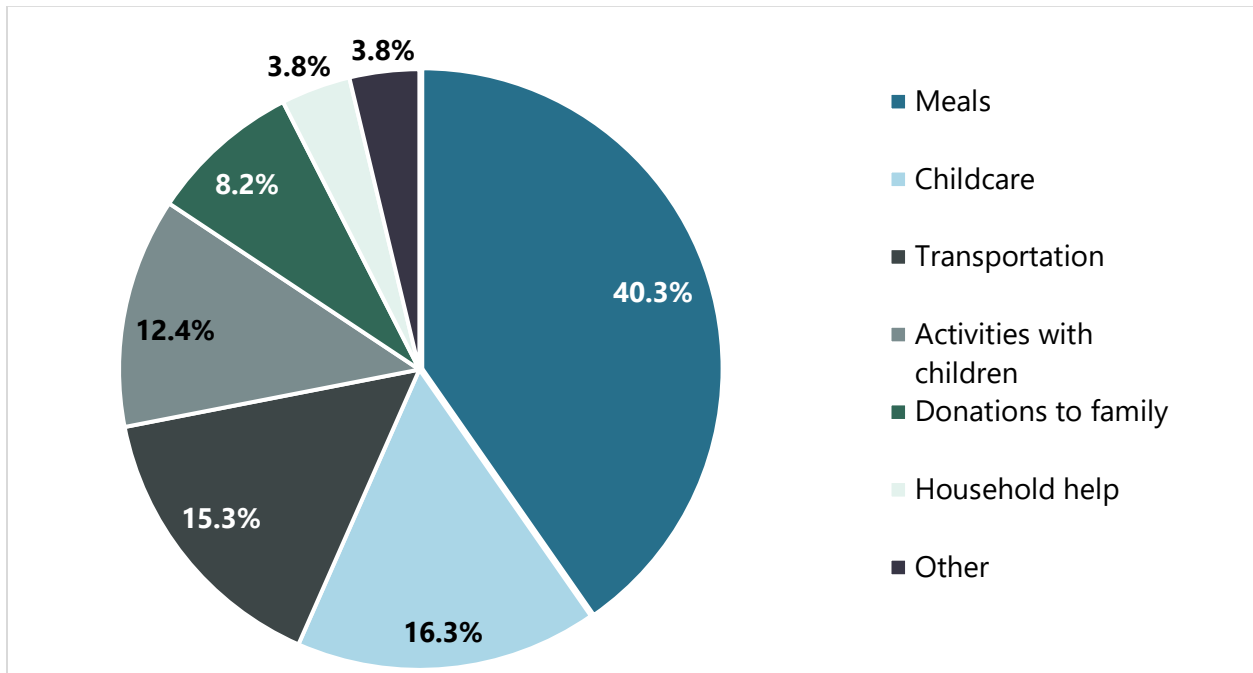
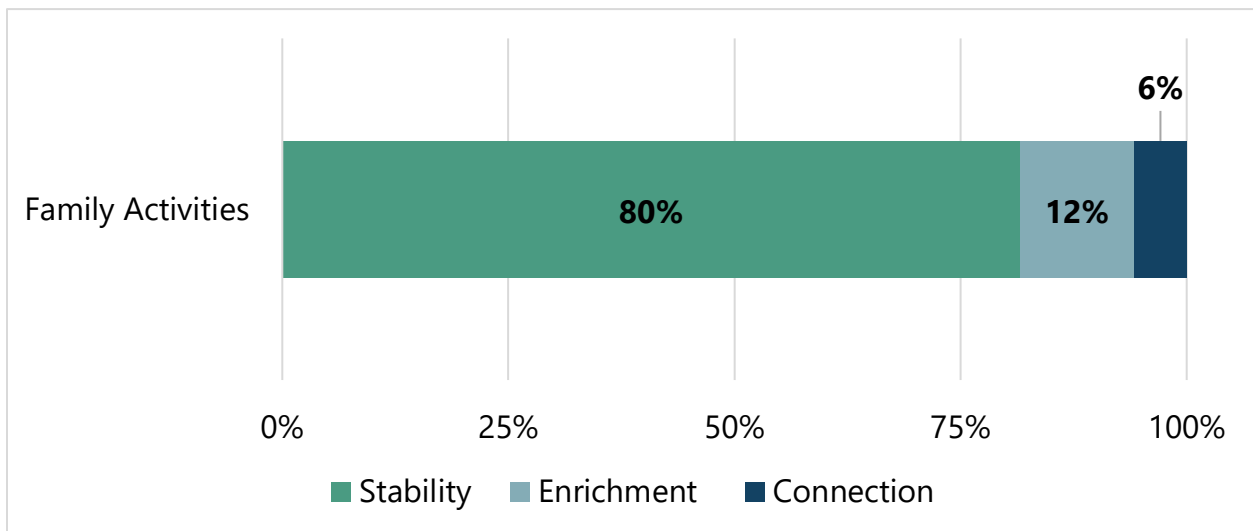


Figure 2. Percentage of Activities with Families by KPI Category





In addition to these usual activities provided to families, any activities provided to families that are above the requested support are classified as Make A Difference (MAD) activities, and they

are categorized into the same KPIs. There are a range of MAD activities, but some examples are: avoidance of disruption, emotional support and affirmation of foster parents, and learning of new life and job skills. Similar to the distribution of usual activities, Stability was the most reported type of MAD KPI (54%), followed by Connection (18.0%) then Enrichment (15.4%). MAD Stability activities were significantly positively correlated with MAD Enrichment activities as well as with months of service with FH.



I didn't realize how much I needed them. I'm like, 'I can do this on my own,' kind of attitude at first, but ... looking back, I would have never guessed that we needed that much help, but we did end up using them quite a bit."

Impact on Families

Of the foster parents interviewed, there was a mixed amount of time spent with Fostering Hope (from less than one year to over three years), which related to mixed perceptions of the relationships they established with volunteers. In general, foster parents valued their relationship with FH volunteers and staff and appreciated how FH impacted their families. The foster parents that had spent a year or less with FH felt challenged around the extent to

which they were able to build a strong relationship with their volunteer team, particularly because of the COVID-19 pandemic and how that affected their ability to spend time in person with volunteers. However, some also shared that they had built ongoing relationships with one or two volunteers who continued to stay in touch beyond their time receiving supports and services from FH. One foster parent shared that fostering has *"been a difficult thing to do, as you know, so we needed a lot of help, and they [volunteers] were one piece of the puzzle, but they just didn't have as much time as [family members]"* as the reason that they were not able to establish a strong relationship with volunteers before leaving FH. One suggestion for improvement shared by several foster parents was to create a list of what that group of volunteers could provide and their availability (e.g., could they be called on during the day or only on weeknights and weekends). Having a list of options at the beginning of engagement could help facilitate that supportive relationship with volunteers.

There were also many similar stories across foster parents of what worked well for establishing relationships with volunteers, such as:

- Having a strong coordinator that helped volunteers and families bond in different ways, particularly through social gatherings
- A change to the format of initial meetings to move away from having a team meeting in parents' homes, and instead, hold initial meetings at the FH office (being surrounded by strangers in their own living room felt overwhelming to some parents)
- One or two volunteers meeting children at a time, rather than all at once
- Community events that allowed families to get to know volunteers beyond a helping relationship
- Volunteers with the training to meet the families where they are, without judgment or forced values, as well as an understanding of foster care and children's trauma

When asked about the impact that Fostering Hope's volunteer supports and services made on their families, two themes emerged: 1) giving time back to marriages and families and 2) providing encouragement and support. When talking about the help towards their marriage, one foster parent elaborated that *"we've gone on a few date nights ... I can count on one hand how many dates we've had in the past three years, so, in the next month, we're getting like two or three date nights. I mean, it's just going to be amazing. It's resetting us to be able to walk this long haul."* Their date nights, as well as time

given by volunteers when they visited at home, also gave their children an opportunity to bond with volunteers.

Another foster parent explained that *"as the foster parent, it gave you time because you're still trying to live your own life, you have your own stuff, plus now you have the foster child's stuff. Being able to go ... time to go run some errands, go get groceries, just go get some of your own person stuff accomplished so that you can continue with your own life."* Another

parent described the support from FH volunteers as different because *"it just feels more like familial than so much of what, DHS is, which is, you know, 'Kids, kids, kids. What are the kids doing? What are the kids doing?' like, and not really about us, which is what it's intended to be, but it's nice to have something that's your team, that's for everybody."* These remarks indicate that Fostering Hope provided foster parents with time and

“ The loving, caring people in our living room, there only because they wanted to help us, was just really encouraging. And the help they did provide really were helpful, especially those times when we got a bit of a break because of what they did. And we just needed it. It was really life-giving, when things were super hard.”



space to have experiences beyond being a foster parent, which rejuvenated them for their families.

Foster parents also truly valued the encouragement and support provided by the FH volunteers and staff. They appreciated that support so they felt understood and they did not feel alone. One foster parent shared that *"I feel like I really got like the social support ... I feel sometimes it's very isolating to be in these situations ... that social support was so important to me and my husband, he really bonded with some of the husbands on the first team."* For another foster parent, the support from FH showed in that, *"it's one thing to just be there, but not listen or give advice. They were great about not just giving advice. They were good at listening. But then it's another thing to listen and actually be willing to try to do something about it, and they were all willing."* One foster parent also recounted their appreciation for FH coordinator's and volunteers' trauma-informed knowledge, saying that *"they really understood the children and how we had a child that was a meth baby and there were a lot of behavioral issues that went along with that and they-- when they would come to our home and help, they understood him and understood his challenges and it was just amazing that they were so empathetic to those kinds of challenges."*

Work with Youth

FH began their *Fostering Adulthood* program in 2018 by tracking Core Program youth who are about to transition out of foster care and offering them support and services. The *Fostering Adulthood* program follows a similar model of support as the one they use with families by surrounding youth with volunteers that serve as mentors, resources, and as community connectors. FH embeds their support to these youth transitioning out of foster care within a trauma-informed care model to support their growth into independent adulthood.⁵

Since 2018, FH has conducted outreach to 60 youth and are currently engaged with 25 youth in their *Fostering Adulthood* program. FH tracks activities and key life events and progress for these youth. Of the 60 youth with information tracked by FH, 70% had aged out of their foster homes and 70% attained a high school degree, while another 5% attained a GED.

Some youth outcomes are tracked by FH are similar to data points collected by the state of Colorado for the *National Youth in Transition Database* (NYTD; see Table 2).⁶ The purpose of the NYTD is to evaluate states' policies and practices related to collecting and reporting timely, reliable, and accurate data on youth making the transition from foster care to self-sufficient

⁵ Fehrenbach, T., Ford J., Olafson E., Kisiel, C., Chang, R., Kerig, P., Khumalo, M., Walsh, C., Ocampo, A., Pickens, I., Miller, A., Rains, M., McCullough, A.D., Spady, L., & Pauter, S. (2022). *A trauma-informed guide for working with youth involved in multiple systems*. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

⁶ Colorado Department of Human Services. (2022, February). *Colorado National Youth in Transition Database Outcomes*. CDHS Community Performance Center.
http://www.cdhsdatamatters.org/uploads/2/4/8/8/24880735/nytd_data_outcomes_and_memo.pdf

adulthood by collecting data for cohorts of youth at 17, 19, and 21 years of age. Please note that the information collected by FH for their youth are cumulative, while Colorado's information submitted to NYTD was collected during their Cohort 2 data collection in 2018 at age 21 (this cohort entered the data collection at age 17 in 2014).⁷

Table 2. Youth Outcomes for Fostering Adulthood Youth and Colorado NYTD Cohort 2

Outcomes	Fostering Adulthood Youth (N = 60)	Colorado NYTD Cohort 2 (data collected in 2018 at age 21)
Currently attending school	5%	25%
High School degree	75% (including 5% who attained GED)	missing
Experienced homelessness	15%	36%
Had children	7%	29%
Experienced incarceration	10%	21%

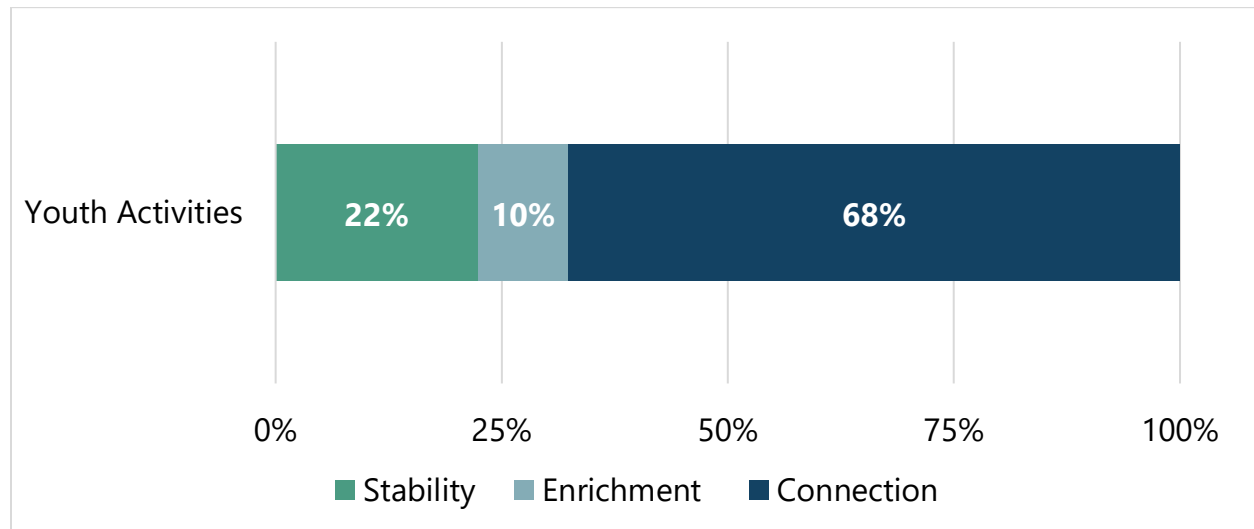
Of the 25 youth engaged with the program between 2020 and 2021, they had an average age of 20.2 years and the majority were male (64%). During this period, youth were engaged in an average of 13.2 activities, and activities with youth lasted an average of 2.13 hours. The types of activities most often reported with youth were related to relationship-building (particularly for fun or hanging-out activities, other, bonding, and interests), followed by coping assistance activities (particularly for help with transportation and apartment/living situations). Similar to activities conducted with families, activities with youth were also categorized into KPIs. However, unlike families, activities with youth most often fell into the Connection category (67.6%), followed by Stability (22.4%), and Enrichment (10%); see Figure 4. Activities that were categorized into the Connection KPI included relationship-building and community-building activities (such as, the monthly Haven gatherings held by FH staff) while coping assistance activities contributed to the Stability KPI.

These results show the activities that resonated more with youth were around connection-building, whereas for families, activities that provided them with stability were more frequent. As outlined in the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's (NCTSN) *Trauma-Informed Guide for Working with Youth Involved in Multiple Systems* (see Footnote 5), building these one-on-one

⁷ More information about the National Youth in Transition Database Reviews can be found here: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/monitoring/nytd-reviews>

and community connections are important for youth transitioning out of foster care to be self-sufficient adults. In particular, FH provides them with an understanding and supportive network of adults and youth peers, role models that demonstrate other ways of responding to stress, adversity, etc., a community of peers with similar experiences, and a safe network (of FH coordinators and volunteers) who connect with them as full partners in developing and supporting their progression towards their goals.

Figure 3. Percentage of Activities with Former Foster Youth by KPI Category



FH staff also rated youth on their progress across life areas that indicate independence, such as housing, employment, goal orientation, etc. from 1 = *Needs Full Support* to 5 = *Fully Independent*. Youth are rated every six to nine months, depending on each youth's needs, and the ratings allow staff to determine which areas need more support. In FH's data, 30 ratings were available from 18 individual youth (12 of whom had more than one rating). On average, the highest rated areas were Self-Care ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.23$), Medical/Dental Health ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.21$), and Social/Recreation ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.13$). These ratings indicated that on average, youth were moving closer towards full independence. Meanwhile, lowest rated areas were Finance ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.24$) and Relationship with Mentors/Volunteers ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.14$). Ratings across life areas were not significantly correlated with time receiving services from FH.

Value of FH from Youth Perspective

In interviews and focus groups, youth described many areas in which Fostering Hope provided support that made an impact in their lives. Those areas of support included:

- Financial support
- Educational support
- Independent living (apartments, roommates, furnishings, etc.)

- Internships and jobs
- Building trusting relationships with others

Youth expressed their appreciation for and impact of their relationship with FH. They identified the various services and resources that they have received through FH, including apartments, furnishings, transportation, and support with finances where necessary. Each instance of these types of supports are tracked for each youth within FH's administrative data.

“

I'd say they're very much like the family that most people normally would get when they grow up with their family ... it's very family oriented.”

However, more valuable than the tangible resources provided by FH, youth spoke warmly about the relationships with FH staff and volunteers. For all of the ways that FH's supports and resources guided youth towards independent living, these supports and resources also preserved relationships with FH volunteers and staff as part of their ongoing support system. Youth valued this support system for giving them consistent relationships that allowed them to have a sense of family on whom they could rely. One youth shared that *“I think everyone that I've come in contact with, they've just been very welcoming and understanding and just there in any way that I need them to be”* while another youth shared that FH *“helped me find a home to rent and just helped me with food and getting to and from work and school and yeah, it was like a social safety net type of thing where I knew that I would have help with my most basic needs and that was really helpful.”* Another former foster youth aptly described that *“for me consistency is very important, because as a foster kid you move from home to home, and you kind of lose trust and you lose kind of faith in people ... You're kind of abandoned, so consistency is important, because you can build that trust ... and with the Fostering Hope I have maybe two or three people that I can trust.”* One foster youth summarized the importance of Fostering Hope by

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For me the biggest impact I would say is independency ... they helped me to feel more confident, to be more open to people.”

saying that, *"having Fostering Hope be there for everything and anything that we need them to be and for numerous years kind of helps us heal in a way that being in foster care doesn't."*

Volunteering for Fostering Hope

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with Fostering Hope's volunteers for *Core Program* and *Fostering Adulthood* as well as their coordinators from both programs. Overall, both staff respected their work with families and youth and saw their efforts as an important service. When volunteers were asked about why they chose to volunteer with FH, responses indicated they wanted to "give back" (as a call to service) and they wanted to help foster parents, specifically. What led them to volunteering (to give back and to help foster parents) was that they were inspired from the talks given at their churches as well as how volunteering would be a good fit with their availability and interests. Figure 5 provides example quotes that represent these themes.

Figure 4. Summary of themes explaining why volunteers chose Fostering Hope





The Call to Service for Volunteers

Overwhelmingly, volunteers recognized that they were doing this work with foster families and former foster youth because it was a call to service. One volunteer shared that *"like with volunteering for anything, it makes you feel good. And Fostering Hope seems to be a really good organization and I felt very supported through all the time of what I've been doing plus seeing some of the successes with the kids ... really makes it feel like what you're doing is valuable and that it is making a difference. So that's why it's been meaningful for me and why I've stayed with it."* Another volunteer stated, *"I really like the fact that I feel purposeful, like I'm really doing something valuable, and other volunteer organizations I've been in before I didn't get the feedback that is so valuable to me like I do with Fostering Hope."* Responses from the volunteers indicated that they were grateful themselves for the opportunity to do what they can to support these families and youth as they navigated their foster care experiences.

Another volunteer spoke about the humility they felt in volunteering with FH because *"I don't feel like we do enough. I feel guilty like we're not doing enough. And then when I was explaining the joy that we feel when we're with the kids and we see how happy they are it almost makes me kind of feel selfish because now I'm getting a high off of this."* Several volunteers echoed this sentiment, in that, while they are being called to service, there is a dual nature of also benefitting from their experiences and the relationships they developed. Another volunteer described the meaning they take from volunteering as, *"it's the individual connection and just the help when you do something like deliver a meal or take someone somewhere or babysit or something like that ... the gratitude that they show and how thankful they are, and just knowing that you're supporting someone that's doing such wonderful work. By extension you feel like you're a little bit a part of that."*

Volunteers also spoke on the importance of their volunteer team to be able to count on each other for support when their families or youth are faced with challenges. They acknowledged that supporting families and youth can be emotionally challenging since they build close relationships. One volunteer stated that *"I've developed friendships within my group of the other volunteers ... I wouldn't say anything for me is too overwhelming, there's been some times that have been a little harder and a little easier, but nothing that makes me want to say, 'I don't want to do this anymore.' I mean it helps the bigger the group, so I just I guess I don't know particularly what sustains me other than just the relationships."*



Summary and Recommendations

Fostering Hope's mission is to provide a caring community of supports that contribute to stable, connected, and enriched foster families and former foster youth. The findings from this program



Fostering Hope has been an asset to this community and the foster parents, volunteers, and partners all share about the positive impact it has had on them."

evaluation indicate that foster parents and youth value their relationships with volunteers and staff and recognize the positive impact that Fostering Hope has brought to their lives. FH also continues to improve on their own practice, as they develop a more comprehensive training around trauma-informed practice for their *Fostering Adulthood* program based on the 8 Cs framework (see Footnote 2). FH also collects a comprehensive amount of administrative data on the families, youth, and volunteers involved with their services. With some adjustments that build on their strengths, FH can continue to conduct ongoing program evaluation of their efforts.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on challenges and ideas stakeholders shared in their interviews or focus groups that could help advance Fostering Hope's programming. The Butler team also shared some suggestions to continue FH's evaluation efforts.

Organizational (Internal) Efforts

- Continue to provide consistent training for staff and volunteers, and have particular focus on FH's values and practice model with meeting families and youth where they are. Consider doing refresher trainings with both experienced and newer staff in order to have consistent practice among all coordinators.
- Coordinators should initiate discussion with each volunteer team to build a list of supports they can provide to their assigned family and offer that list to foster parents at the first team meeting in order to have an immediate start on what the team can offer to the parents (e.g., if the volunteer team consists of all weekday working professionals, then transportation or babysitting during the weekdays should not be offered).
- Connect new volunteers with experienced volunteers (even those on other teams) in order to have another source of support and guidance to go to when working with families or youth.

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- Continue outreach to faith organizations and other providers to build a community of resources that can support the families and youth that supplement (add to) what FH provides.

Communication and Collaboration with Other Community Organizations

- Staff and volunteers expressed a desire for more consistent communication with El Paso County DHS and with foster placement agencies in order to build stronger partnerships and awareness of Fostering Hope's services to the community.
- Improve outreach with case managers at DHS and foster care agencies, particularly since there can be high turnover among case managers. This can build better recognition of FH and increase referrals.

Work with Foster Families and Youth

- More group events, particularly for entire families, can provide opportunities not only for foster parents to build a community with each other, but also for the older foster children to get to know each other.
- Provide more supports in the summer to help foster parents with childcare since school is not in session.
- Increase consistency with letting families know what supports can be offered and when (e.g., if volunteers can do transportation or not, if childcare is allowed or not).
- Continue to have a ready "store" of supplies that foster families and youth can ask for in case of emergencies (e.g., age-appropriate clothes, toys, furniture, and other supplies for last-minute placements).
- Continue to build on supports provided through *Fostering Adulthood* and determine the next growth areas of the program. For example, consider how to build up supports that can be offered to youth transitioning out of foster care who may have higher needs that must be met to achieve independence.

Ongoing Evaluation

In order to continue developing the program evaluation to support better understanding of FH's strengths and areas for improvement, we suggest the following:

- Build consistent data collection timelines and reminders and offer coordinators refresher trainings on what information to enter and how.
 - For example, schedule consistent times (every 6 months) for each engaged youth to assess them on their independence indicators. Consistent timing and repeated assessments for as many youth as possible will enable future statistical analysis to assess the program impact on outcomes.
 - Build a data review timeline for program directors to review data at a specific time each month to check for completeness and consistency.

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- Match data points being collected by DHS and NYTD where possible, so that data for FH youth can be compared. Develop a data sharing agreement with DHS to obtain data for families and youth involved with FH and analyze data with a comparison sample.
 - Develop an analysis plan to determine what questions FH is most interested in and develop a plan to conduct timely analyses to gather findings around those questions.