

# YOUTH THRIVE™

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

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Center  
for the  
Study  
of  
Social  
Policy

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Dear Youth Development and Child Welfare Colleagues,

**The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) is excited to announce that we are conducting a national search to identify and recognize exemplary programs or initiatives that use protective and promotive factors to reduce risks and enhance healthy development for youth in foster care and the child welfare system.** Based on relevant research and central to Youth Thrive's approach, the protective and promotive factors are: youth resilience, social connections, knowledge of adolescent development, concrete support in times of need, and cognitive and social-emotional competence.

The purpose of this search is to find innovative approaches and gain a better understanding of how protective and promotive factors can be used to achieve positive results for a very vulnerable population, specifically adolescents and their families who have contact with the child welfare system. We are looking for initiatives that help these young people to truly thrive. CSSP has convened a panel of [national experts](#) – with experience in philanthropy, research, training, child welfare, mental health and other services – to advise us on the overall search process.

We know that it is hard work to provide basic services to youth in foster care. However for this search, **we are looking for programs, initiatives, policy or system changes that go beyond the basics and are doing something exceptional.** For example, do you know of a child welfare agency that has totally revamped its services for youth and families to incorporate new knowledge of adolescent brain development and the impact of trauma? An organization that has dramatically changed specific policies and procedures in order to proactively build protective and promotive factors? An initiative where youth in foster care are participating in *positive* risk-taking activities? A program that has devised creative ways to utilize young people's assets in leadership or community service roles? Or an agency that has made changes to systems that support innovations e.g., new approaches to training, contracts, accountability or funding? If you do, please let us know about these unique efforts.

## **Call for Nominations**

We are asking you to nominate initiatives that meet the follow criteria:

- Work with adolescents (between the ages of 11 and 21) who are involved in the child welfare system.
  - Nominees do not need to *exclusively* serve youth in foster care or involved with the child welfare system (i.e., they may work with a variety of young people including youth in care). If that is the case, youth in care or involved with the

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child welfare system should constitute a significant number/percentage of the population served.

- Nominees may target a narrower age range within 11 to 21 years old (i.e., participants could all be high school age students).
- Operated by:
  - State, local or tribal agencies
  - private child welfare agencies or foster care providers
  - national or local nonprofit organizations
  - community-based or faith-based organizations.
- Actively build some or all of the following protective and promotive factors to help youth thrive:
  1. **Youth resilience:** foster youths' internal ability to adapt to life experiences.
  2. **Social connections:** promote safe, stable, equitable and supportive environments and relationships with family and other adults; create opportunities for constructive engagement in family, community, school or social institutions.
  3. **Knowledge of youth development:** provide accurate, interesting information about youth development (e.g., brain development, the impact of trauma) and/or information to prevent negative outcomes (e.g., substance abuse, pregnancy, suicide).
  4. **Concrete support in times of need:** help meet basic needs (e.g., housing, health, violence prevention) or provide skill-building opportunities (e.g., tutoring, counseling, legal services, workforce development).
  5. **Cognitive and social-emotional competence:** engage youth in behaviors that build executive functioning skills and character strengths and promote healthy development (e.g., nutrition and exercise, positive risk taking, impulse control, cultural interests, moral or spiritual growth).
- Nominees do not need to address all of the protective factors. In fact, innovative and significant work in one area could be as important and exemplary as a broad commitment to all of the factors.

In addition, we are looking for programs that meet the following criteria:

- Have evidence of effectiveness
- Use a strengths-based approach
- Have developed or revised systems or infrastructure to support the initiative (e.g., quality control, accountability, staffing, training, contracting)
- Engage youth in decision-making and program operations
- Are attuned to the needs of diverse racial and ethnic groups and LGBTQ populations.

To nominate a program that you consider to be exemplary, please use the [Youth Thrive Exemplary Program Nominations form](#). **All nominations are due by April 19th.**

## **Selection Process**

CSSP staff and advisors will review all nominations and select a subset of agencies/organizations that will be invited to submit more detailed applications. Those applications will then be reviewed and assessed, and a subset of applicants will be asked to host a site visit by CSSP staff/advisors. Site visits will give us the opportunity to see the program, initiative, policy or system change in action and to talk directly with the program director, frontline staff, and youth participants. These finalists will receive an honorarium of \$1,000 to help cover costs associated with organizing the site visit. After the site visits, CSSP will select a final cohort that will be recognized as Youth Thrive Exemplary Programs. For information regarding the time line, please view the Exemplary Programs [search process](#).

Those selected as Youth Thrive Exemplary Programs will receive the following benefits:

- National recognition as an exceptional program working to help youth in the child welfare system to thrive.
- A written description of the exemplary program that will be featured on the CSSP website and distributed to CSSP's extensive list of contacts, including child welfare administrators, policymakers, funders, practitioners and advocates.
- Expenses covered for two program staff to participate in the first Youth Thrive Exemplary Program Forum. The meeting will be an opportunity to:
  - share information on program and approach
  - learn about other exemplary programs and network with peers
  - hear from experts working on research, policy and practice related to positive development for youth in foster care.
- Inclusion in press releases, social media and other external public outreach efforts about the exemplary programs and forum.

To learn more about the Youth Thrive framework, please click [here](#). If you have questions or comments about this process, please contact [Francie Zimmerman](#).

Please feel free to forward this letter to others who would be interested in nominating programs. It is fine for agencies, initiatives or organizations to nominate themselves. We very much look forward to receiving your nominations and to learning more about exemplary youth development programs and policies for adolescents in foster care. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,



Susan Notkin

Associate Director

Center for the Study of Social Policy