



6 MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

The Texas Foster Youth Health Initiative (TFYHI) builds relationships across child welfare and adolescent health systems to promote optimal health for child welfare-involved youth. This report describes our work and progress during the planning phase of this Initiative from **July 15 to December 31, 2020**.

OUR GOAL:

Youth in foster care feel **connected, safe, and empowered** and **make informed decisions** about their sexual health and relationships.

WE:

ARE DESIGNED BY YOUTH FOR YOUTH.

Our Young Adult Consultants will be leading the design of our youth engagement strategies that aim to empower, inform, and support youth in care.

VALUE INDIVIDUALS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES.

Through continuous collaboration and engagement of stakeholders and participants, we are building experiences for youth and their caregivers that inform, support, and strengthen skills.



RECOGNIZE NO ONE LIVES IN A BUBBLE.

We take into account that thoughts and behaviors are shaped by relationships and the environment. Addressing the biases and barriers youth face will happen every step of the way.

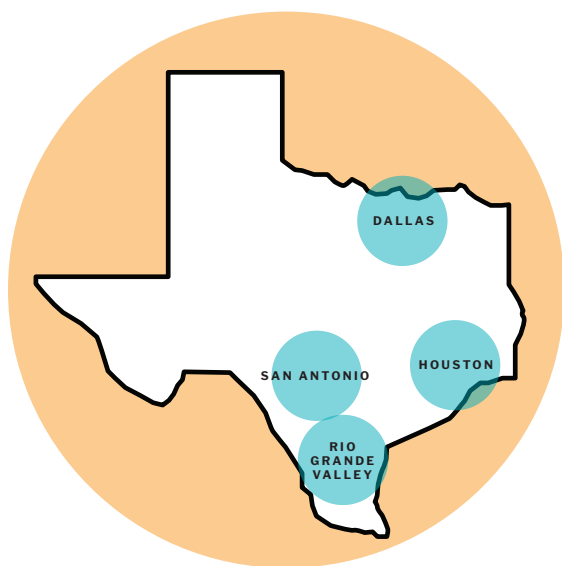
ARE THE FIRST STATEWIDE LEARNING COMMUNITY OF OUR KIND IN TEXAS.

We're not just delivering a sex ed class to youth or a training for caregivers. We are bringing together child welfare professionals and adolescent health leaders to develop sustainable interventions and improve systems.

INCLUDE & SUPPORT CAREGIVERS.

We recognize the critical part adults play in a young person's life. Our Caregiver Consultants will help us develop tools and resources for adults so they feel comfortable with ongoing conversations about sex and relationships and can support the youth in their care.

We established The Texas Innovation Network:



The Texas Innovation Network is composed of partners that represent both the child welfare and adolescent health systems, and are committed to improving optimal health outcomes for youth in foster care. The Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing (TXICFW) at UT Austin, the Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (the Texas Campaign), and the Texas Alliance for Child and Family Services (Alliance) are partners with statewide focus that have expertise in advocacy, training, research, evaluation, and collaboration. Healthy Futures of Texas (Rio Grande Valley and San Antonio), the North Texas Alliance to Reduce Unintended Pregnancy in Teens (NTARUPT) (Dallas), and the Texas Campaign in collaboration with the Harris County Youth Collective (Houston) focus on providing culturally sensitive sexual health education in their respective communities.

Eight young adult consultants and six caregiver consultants have also been hired to provide direction and support for the Initiative.

We learned what is going on now:

During the planning period, we conducted an extensive environmental scan comprised of ongoing research with youth in foster care and their caregivers, a literature review, conversations among TFYHI partners, and interviews with stakeholders including Texas Department of Family and Protective Services Regional Directors, child welfare judges, child placing agencies, and health care providers.

Based on our environmental scan, we confirmed a clear need to address the disproportionately high rates of teen pregnancy, STIs, sexual and dating violence, and sexual exploitation among youth involved with the child welfare system. Throughout our meetings with leaders in the child welfare system, we identified the need for ongoing support and conversations with youth about their sexuality and relationships. We also identified a need for LGBTQIA+ inclusive resources as these youth are overrepresented in the child welfare system and need resources to develop a positive sense of self and take care of their sexual health.

To date, efforts to address this problem have been fragmented and have not yielded sustainable and impactful solutions. We intend to develop multi-layered interventions that together strengthen adult-youth relationships, provide multiple touchpoints for youth to learn about sexual health and healthy relationships, and create systems that are responsive to the needs of youth with extensive trauma histories.



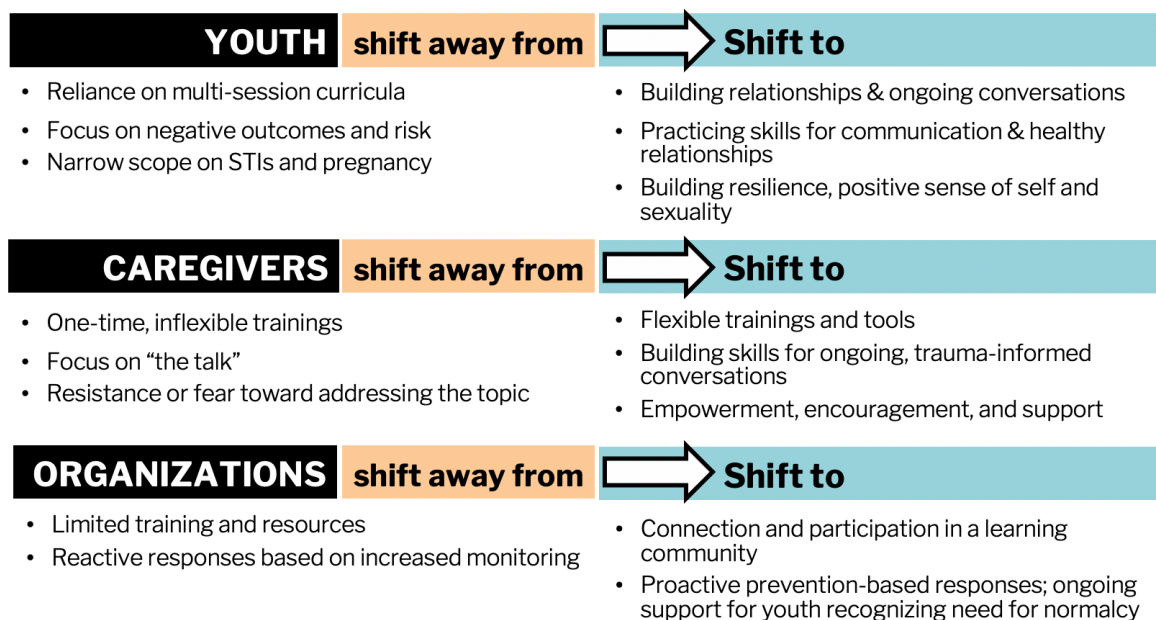
I think that even sitting down and talking to a child that's hurt or any of that can start a positive relationship. So, it's kind of like even that small little conversation can change a person's mindset, or maybe help them open up a little bit more every day.

*-Youth formerly in care
Learning About Healthy Relationships Study*

We know what needs to change:

We identified major changes that need to occur in attitudes, beliefs, policies, and practices in order for youth in care to feel connected, safe, empowered and make informed decisions. The following shifts form the basis of this Initiative's approach.

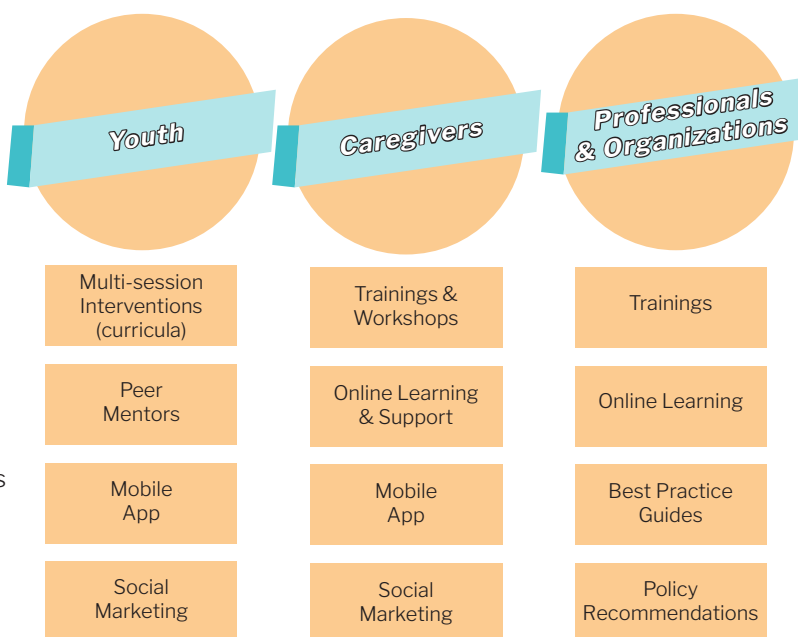
INTERVENTIONS & RESOURCES FOR



We determined our approach:

We recognize that youth are a part of multiple systems, have multiple caregivers, and thus, there are multiple paths to successfully engage youth in their own healthcare and health decisions.

TFYHI developed an intervention plan that addresses multiple levels of the socioecological model: curricula and peer mentorship programs for youth; online apps to provide individual support for youth and adults; training and online learning community for caregivers and professionals; trainings and best practice guides for child welfare agencies and health care providers; and social marketing.



Our next steps:

In the next 6 months we plan to continue to develop and strengthen our Texas Innovation Network by providing regular trainings and technical assistance to all network partners. We will be testing and adapting different interventions that aim to educate and empower youth and their caregivers. Each partner will be actively working to create local community stakeholder groups in the Initiative's four major areas: Dallas, San Antonio, Houston and The Rio Grande Valley. These groups may work with previously existing coalitions in their area that address child welfare or adolescent health. To assist in the creation of a statewide network of engaged stakeholders, we will be launching this Initiative's website and stakeholder newsletter in early 2021.

We will also be regularly meeting with our young adult and caregiver consultants to develop the online resources and social marketing components of this project.

If you have any questions about the TFYHI, please contact TFYHI Project Manager, Sharon Hofer at sharon.hoefer@austin.utexas.edu.

TFYHI BY THE NUMBERS

From July to December 2020:

5

organizations formed The Texas Innovation Network.

28

professionals were engaged in an environmental scan of the situation for youth in care in Texas.

14

young adults (8) & caregivers (6) have been hired to provide direction and support for the project.