



FINAL 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 final report describes the work and progress of TFYHI from its beginning in **August 2020** to **August 2023**.

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 lead 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 build 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 happens 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 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.

Youth in foster care are twice as likely to experience a pregnancy before age 19, have a greater risk of contracting an STI, including HIV, and use condoms and contraceptives at lower rates than youth in the general population. Rates of intimate partner violence are also higher among youth in foster care, and intimate partner violence is associated with higher rates of STIs, HIV, and unintended pregnancy.

As recipient of a Tier 2 Innovation and Impact Network Grant, TFYHI convened a multi-disciplinary learning community that sought to design innovative approaches to sexual health education that:

- 1. Address the unique needs of youth in foster care**
- 2. Support foster caregivers and child welfare professionals**
- 3. Promote systemic and sustained changes in child welfare settings.**

This final report summarizes our innovation process, interventions, and next steps.

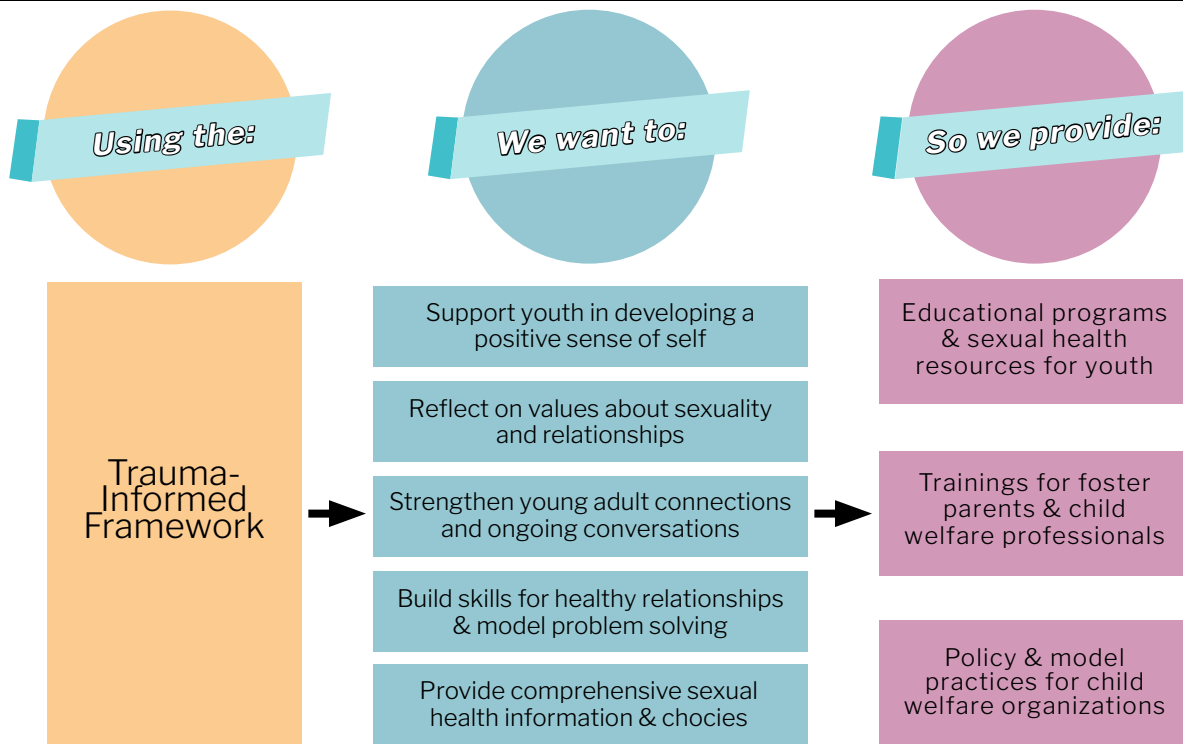
OUR NETWORK



We took an intentional and collaborative approach to our innovation process. In pursuing our goal of designing user-centered sexual health interventions, we prioritized the perspectives and experiences of youth in care, foster caregivers, and child welfare professionals.

We engaged a multidisciplinary learning community which included young adult and caregiver consultant groups, community stakeholders, and child welfare partners. By working collaboratively, we identified strategies for intervention design, developed prototypes, and refined interventions with feedback from community stakeholders, participants, and facilitators. In the final phase, we conducted formative evaluation to assess the feasibility of implementing our interventions.

OUR INTERVENTIONS



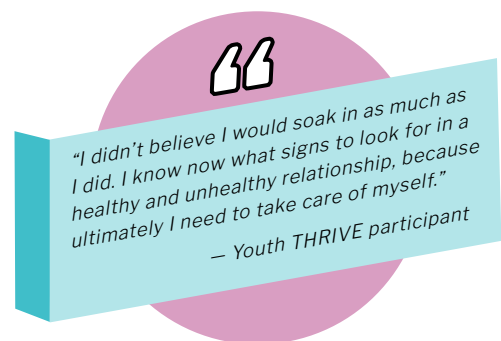
Our team decided to design interventions that support not only youth, but the caregivers, professionals, and environments around them. Our intent was for these interventions to reinforce each other and provide opportunities for learning and change not only at the individual level, but also at the interpersonal and organizational levels. All interventions were built on the key strategies described above to provide a consistent and coordinated approach.

THRIVE

THRIVE is a trauma-informed, inclusive, and strengths-based curriculum for youth in foster care. The curriculum aims to affirm young people’s self-worth and identities, build skills for healthy relationships, and provide accurate information about STI/HIV and pregnancy prevention. THRIVE takes an interactive approach that invites youth to engage in creative group activities, work through real life scenarios, problem solve, and support each other.

The 10-hour curriculum can be delivered in flexible formats, including five 2-hour sessions, three 3.5-hour sessions, or two, 5-hour weekend workshops in order to accommodate various child welfare settings. THRIVE is intended for in-person delivery for small groups of 5 – 15 youth, ages 13 – 19.

To date, **130 youth** from across Texas have participated in THRIVE. Participant feedback shows THRIVE is feasible to implement, engaging for youth, and supported by child welfare professionals. Youth participants shared that they acquired new knowledge, learned how to advocate for their sexual health needs, and continued to reflect on their relationships after THRIVE sessions.



[Learn more about the curriculum](#) and check out our [THRIVE resources for youth!](#)

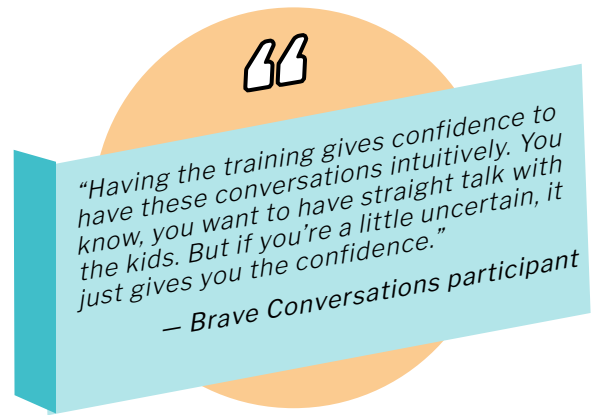
BRAVE CONVERSATIONS

The Brave Conversations training for foster caregivers and other supportive adults builds skills for ongoing conversations with youth about sexuality and relationships. Training topics include a reflection on personal and social values about sexuality, strategies for creating safe environments, tools for trauma-informed conversations, and a discussion of developmentally appropriate responses to sexual behaviors, questions, and concerns.

Brave Conversations can be delivered virtually or in-person, in two 2-hour sessions or one 4-hour session for groups of 5 to 20 caregivers and professionals. The training provides opportunities for group discussion, individual reflection, and skill practice.

We successfully implemented Brave Conversations in partnership with child welfare agencies. To date, **415** caregivers and child welfare professionals have participated in a Brave Conversations training. Participants reported high satisfaction with the training and appreciated the safe training space and open conversations. Post-training surveys showed significant increases in participants' confidence in leading conversations about sexuality and healthy relationships and more positive outcome expectations for these discussions and for youth in their care. These gains were sustained in a 3-month follow-up survey.

[Learn more about the training](#) and check out our [Brave Conversations resources for caring adults!](#)



“Having the training gives confidence to have these conversations intuitively. You know, you want to have straight talk with the kids. But if you’re a little uncertain, it just gives you the confidence.”
– Brave Conversations participant

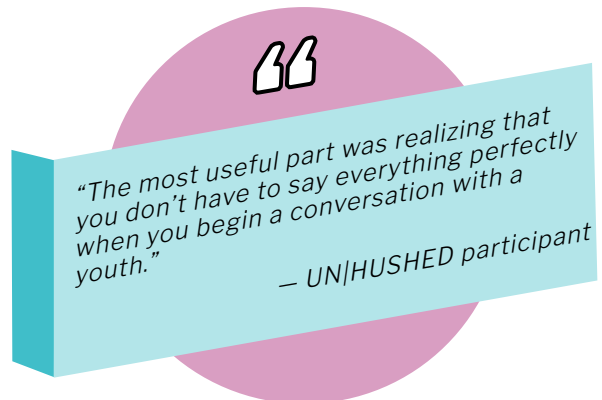
UN|HUSHED

Introduction to Sexuality Education, a training for child welfare professionals, was developed in collaboration with [UNHUSHED](#), a Texas-based organization that seeks to break the silence surrounding human sexuality. This training helps child welfare professionals build skills for engaging in conversations about sexuality and health with youth in their care. The training encourages participants to reflect on organizational practices and discuss strategies for supporting access to sexual health care and resources for youth.

The training consists of a foundational 4-hour workshop, followed by two 2-hour technical assistance sessions. In addition, the training provides a [sample policy on sexual health](#) that can be adapted by participants.

To date, **141** child welfare professionals across Texas have participated in the UN|HUSHED training. Participants indicated overall high satisfaction with the foundational training and appreciated the open conversations on personal, social, and organizational values regarding sexual health. Pre- and post-training surveys showed significant increases in the participants' sense of confidence for conversations about sexuality and healthy relationships and more positive outcome expectations.

[Learn more about our work with UN|HUSHED!](#)

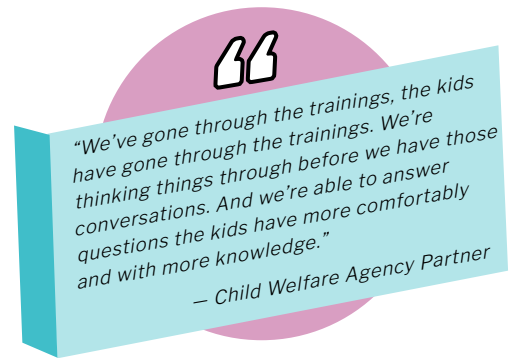


“The most useful part was realizing that you don’t have to say everything perfectly when you begin a conversation with a youth.”
– UN|HUSHED participant

OUR PARTNERSHIPS

As a key strategy for maximizing the impact of our interventions and working toward sustained changes, we engaged child welfare agencies through a call for proposals. Partnering agencies committed to implementing the full set of interventions.

In debriefing sessions after completing all interventions, agency staff reported feeling both more confident and empowered to talk with youth about sexual health. They felt more prepared to engage in conversations with youth and reinforce what youth were learning through participating in THRIVE. Many noted that being more comfortable talking about sexuality and avoiding judgmental language allowed them to connect with youth and have deeper conversations.



OUR FUTURE



Sustain & Grow Community Collaboration

TFYHI seeks to continue stakeholder engagement and community collaboration efforts to keep sexual health a priority, share resources and best practices, and ensure that the needs of youth in foster care are being met.



Rigorously Evaluate THRIVE & Brave Conversations

The Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing received funding to evaluate THRIVE and Brave Conversations. This will allow us to test the combination of THRIVE for youth and Brave Conversations for caregiving staff in congregate care settings.



Continue Implementation of THRIVE & Brave Conversations

The formative evaluation of THRIVE and Brave Conversations indicates these interventions are promising and well-received by youth, caregivers, and child welfare professionals. Child welfare agencies [can request to receive](#) the THRIVE program, Brave Conversations workshop, or facilitator training for both to equip their staff to deliver the interventions themselves.



Explore Organizational Change Processes

We are excited about what we have learned from partnering with child welfare organizations and will seek opportunities to continue this model. In particular we want to explore whether the coordinated implementation of interventions for youth, caregivers, and child welfare professionals will lead to sustained impact and improved sexual health outcomes for youth.

TFYHI BY THE NUMBERS

AUGUST 2020—AUGUST 2023

8

child welfare organizations
partnered with us.

16

consultants (8 youth, 8 caregivers)
advised our work.

401

stakeholders were engaged
throughout the state.

713

caregivers, mentors,
professionals, and youth
participated a TFYHI
intervention.

Want to read our full
final report?

Contact Barbara Ball at barbara.ball@austin.utexas.edu.