



# Developing the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program



PARTNER PERSPECTIVES & LESSONS LEARNED

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## INTRODUCTION

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In Cuyahoga County, Ohio the nation's first county-level Pay for Success (PFS) project is helping policymakers and government leaders measurably improve the lives of its vulnerable families. Over the 5-year duration of the PFS project known as the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program, community leaders in Cuyahoga County are using Pay for Success to improve services for vulnerable families through continuous study of critical questions:

- Is the social safety net designed to support the unique needs of families and children, as well as individuals?
- How can the **county** use data to inform policy decisions to serve the unique needs of these vulnerable families?
- How do **nonprofit service providers** interact with county agencies?
- How can **funders** be supportive of community efforts to best serve vulnerable families?
- How can government, service providers, funders and **evaluators** collaborate with one another to best solve social problems?

Illuminating answers to these questions are crucial for leaders in Cuyahoga County. With each effort to test, refine, and retest through the PFS model, we get critical data and insights that can help us tackle our society's most serious and endemic social issues.

This report is intended to advance the national dialogue around the opportunities and challenges related to PFS projects and to assist others interested in exploring and developing PFS. Because PFS demands collaboration across organizations and sectors, each project partner, whether government, service provider, funder, evaluator, project manager, or intermediary/transaction coordinator naturally experiences the PFS process differently. **This report shares Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program's "lessons learned" through the different perspectives of each project partner.**

Pursuing PFS is challenging, time and data intensive, and will almost certainly push all stakeholders out of their respective comfort zones. Having lived through this environment, the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program stakeholders maintain that the process of launching the project ultimately strengthened the relationship between government, service providers, funders and evaluators. In the end, PFS launched because stakeholders worked toward the same goal: to measurably improve the lives of the most vulnerable families in Cuyahoga County's child welfare system.

The Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program stakeholders remain committed to transparency and improvement during the project's implementation and view this report as a way to fulfill that commitment. The stakeholders also acknowledge that this report more appropriately describes the collaboration that led to the successful launch of the project, and thus it is truly the beginning of their work and learning, rather than the end.

For more detailed background information on the project please visit:  
<http://www.thirdsectorcap.org/cuyahoga/>.

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM CUYAHOGA?

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### *Lessons Learned:* **GOVERNMENT**

- Leadership from multiple levels of government agencies is essential. Assigning a staff member to operationalize the project with the evaluator and provider is also important.
- When initially communicating PFS projects with decision-makers, government should focus on the potential programmatic impact, including measurable improvements in the lives of vulnerable individuals and communities.
- Philanthropy is a catalyst for bringing innovative concepts to the community, and can also contribute social issue expertise, and foster connections with potential project partners.

### *Lessons Learned:* **SERVICE PROVIDER**

- Individuals with expertise to examine/conduct due diligence on the intervention design should join the PFS project team as early as possible.
- A ramp-up or pilot period is critical, as it provides a cushion of time to test out the project's operations before the PFS project launches.
- Provider(s) in PFS projects could benefit from having access to a pool of flexible funds to support unanticipated client needs that arise during implementation.

### *Lessons Learned:* **ADVISOR & INTERMEDIARY**

- Intermediaries/advisors should leverage local relationships to increase morale and support for the project.
- Intermediaries/advisors should discuss the approval processes of government and funder partners early on.
- The intermediary/advisor should engage a Project Manager and Special Purpose Vehicle as soon as possible.
- The Project Manager role should be occupied by a local and well-respected organization that is engaged and present during project construction and project implementation.

### *Lessons Learned:* **FUNDERS**

- Funders bring social issue area expertise, connections, and can help the advisor/intermediary navigate the dynamics of developing a project in a local climate.
- Funders should look for existing collaborations, especially involvement from local funders.
- PFS projects may look beyond commercial funders to CDFIs as funders. Two CDFIs invested in the Program, one as a senior funder and one as a subordinate funder.
- Legal counsel is necessary during PFS construction. Funders should anticipate the need for an experienced transaction lawyer.

### *Lessons Learned:* **EVALUATOR**

- Evaluators should make sure that your community has invested in integrated government data systems. If not, do so now. They are needed for construction of PFS projects.
- Establishing data-sharing agreements early on is critical. Many jurisdictions may benefit from pre-existing agreements.
- PFS contracts should allow the evaluator to use real-time knowledge to inform the evaluation methodology. While the key outcome may be agreed upon early on, the tracking of the experience of the control group requires considerable attention to ensure that adequate data will be available to interpret the findings.

## WHAT IS PAY FOR SUCCESS?

Cuyahoga County, Ohio was one of the first communities to explore, develop, and implement PFS. This section of the report provides general background on the mechanics and key characteristics of PFS.

### WHAT IS PAY FOR SUCCESS?

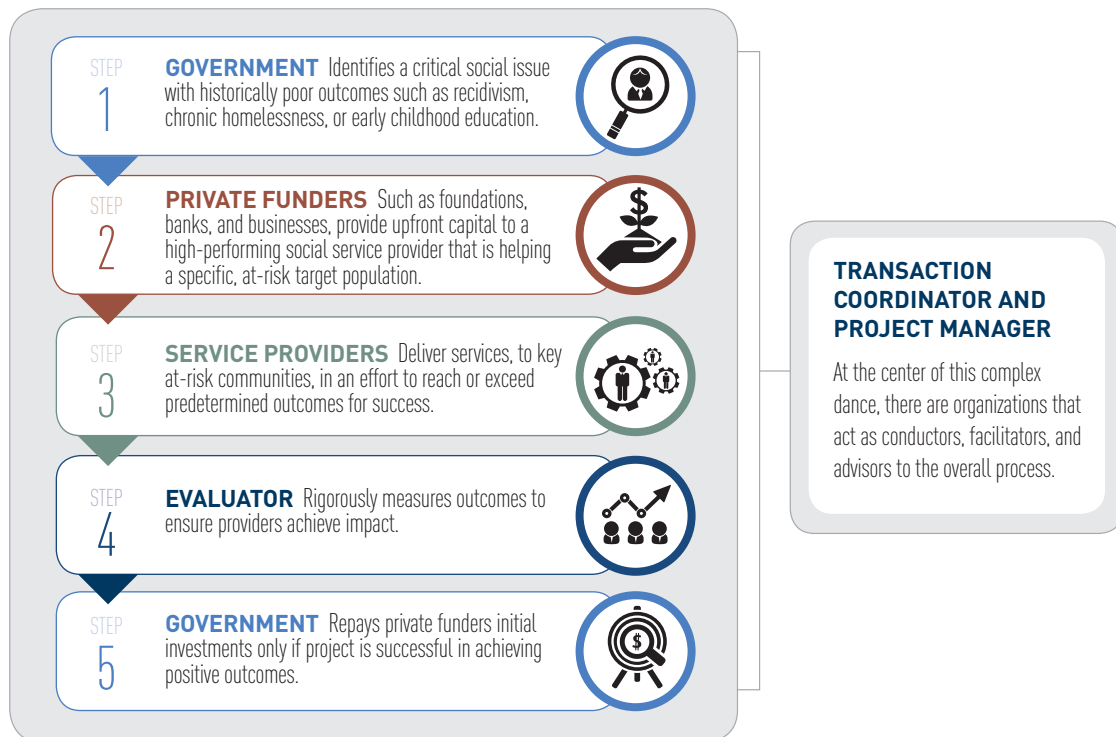
Pay for Success (PFS) is an innovative contracting model that drives government resources toward high-performing social programs in areas such as poverty, education, child welfare, recidivism, homelessness, and wellness. PFS contracts track the effectiveness of intervention programs over time to ensure that funding is directed toward programs that succeed in measurably improving the lives of people most in need.<sup>1</sup>

### WHEN DID THE PAY FOR SUCCESS FIELD BEGIN?

The PFS field first began in 2011 when the Peterborough Social Impact Bond was launched in the United Kingdom. In 2012, the City of New York launched the first PFS project in the United States, in Riker's Island, New York, focused on reducing recidivism for youth aged 16-18. As of the release of this report, there are eight launched PFS projects actively delivering services and approximately 75 projects in various stages of development, from feasibility and construction, to implementation.<sup>2</sup> The Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program is among the first eight PFS projects in the country, and is the first PFS project with a county-level government partner.

### HOW DOES PAY FOR SUCCESS WORK?

*Exhibit I – “Pay for Success Mechanics and Stakeholders Involved” illustrates the key steps involved in a PFS project:*



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<sup>1</sup> Definition of Pay for Success by Third Sector Capital Partners, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> Nonprofit Finance Fund. Pay for Success U.S. Activity fund. <http://www.payforsuccess.org/pay-success-projects-united-states>

## WHAT IS THE CUYAHOGA PARTNERING FOR FAMILY SUCCESS PROGRAM?

### WHY DID CUYAHOGA COUNTY PURSUE THIS PROJECT?

In early 2015, Cuyahoga County launched the first family homelessness and child welfare project in the nation, known as the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program. As part of the Program, FrontLine Service (FrontLine), a comprehensive continuum of care service provider for homeless persons in Ohio, will deliver intensive 12-15 month treatment to 135 families. The program aims to reduce the length of stay in out-of-home foster care placement for children whose caregivers are homeless and housing insecure.

*Exhibit II – “Goal of the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program” illustrates the rationale for developing the Cuyahoga PFS project.*

GOAL
The Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program’s goal is to help families reunify, reaching permanency and stability sooner so that their children spend less time in foster care
PROJECTED PROBLEMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the next 3 years, over 270 families in Cuyahoga County will be separated by abuse and neglect related issues resulting in foster care placement.</li> <li>• These families struggle with substance abuse, mental illness, disability, deep rooted trauma, domestic violence, and unemployment.</li> <li>• Children from these families spend 40% longer in the foster care system as compared to their peers</li> </ul>

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### WHAT ARE THE KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROJECT?

*Exhibit III – “Overview of the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success” highlights key project facts about the Cuyahoga PFS project<sup>3</sup>*

PROGRAM		
5-year project where FrontLine Services provides Critical Time Intervention (CTI), trauma focused therapies, and housing resource links to 135 families in Cuyahoga County, Ohio.		
IMPACT	Decrease days children spend in foster care placement	Evaluation is conducted by Case Western Reserve University, using a randomized controlled trial
FUNDING AND SUCCESS PAYMENTS	\$4 million upfront from private and philanthropic funders	\$5 million in maximum success payments from County of Cuyahoga, Ohio

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<sup>3</sup> For additional overview details on the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program, please view the Project’s Fact Sheet: <http://www.thirdsectorcap.org/cuyahoga/> and Frequently Asked Questions Document: <http://www.thirdsectorcap.org/cuyahoga/>



## WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS, ROLES AND RESOURCES FROM CUYAHOGA?

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The Cuyahoga PFS stakeholders are a team of individuals and organizations that committed time, resources and expertise before, during, and after the launch of the program. The following section provides an overview of each major partner's role and the critical resources they contributed to the project.

### CUYAHOGA COUNTY, OHIO

#### *Role: Government Partner*

Cuyahoga County is home to 1.25 million residents and includes the city of Cleveland and its surrounding metropolitan region. The County government operates according to a newly established County charter, with both an elected County Executive and an elected body of 11 County legislators. Launching the program required the engagement of multiple levels and departments within Cuyahoga County government, each of which provided unique resources:

#### OFFICE OF THE CUYAHOGA COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Almost concurrent with program launch, a new County Executive assumed office. This transition went smoothly, and the County remained committed to PFS. The County Executive contributed:

- Overall project leadership
- Connection to County legislators
- Raising awareness of PFS

#### CUYAHOGA COUNTY DIVISION OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (DCFS)

The County's child welfare agency has more than 1,700 children in temporary or permanent custody at any given time. DCFS contributed the following critical resources to the project:

- Data to determine viable target population
- Day-to-day leadership for ensuring smooth operations
- Deep knowledge of population being served and existing agency processes
- Intense focus on well-being of children in program

#### OFFICE OF HOMELESS SERVICES (OHS)

The City of Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Office of Homeless Services coordinates efforts to reduce and prevent homelessness through the County's local Continuum of Care. The Office of Homeless Services contributed the following key resources:

- Access to the local homeless management information system (HMIS)
- Expertise in supportive housing models for vulnerable populations

## FRONTLINE SERVICE

### *Role: Service Provider*

FrontLine Service is a nonprofit agency that operates Ohio's most comprehensive continuum of care for homeless individuals and families. The organization serves 20,000 adults and children each year in Cuyahoga County. FrontLine contributed significant resources to the project, including:

- Expertise serving highly vulnerable populations
- Experience implementing high-profile, evidence-based programming
- Existing relationships with DCFS
- Dedicated staff to focus on intervention design
- Conscious focus on families served by program
- Data collection capacity including use of electronic medical records

## CUYAHOGA METROPOLITAN HOUSING AUTHORITY, FAMICOS FOUNDATION, EMERALD DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC NETWORK (EDEN)

### *Role: Housing Providers*

The program model includes several housing options for PFS families and requires coordination among three housing providers. Partnering for Family Success housing agencies provided:

- High priority preference for public housing for PFS families from public housing authority
- Variety of tenant-based and project-based vouchers from community-based housing providers

## GEORGE GUND FOUNDATION, CLEVELAND FOUNDATION, SISTERS OF CHARITY FOUNDATION OF CLEVELAND

### *Role: Local Funders*

Cleveland has a robust philanthropic community with a proud culture of collaboration among funders. Local funders worked together and contributed the following key resources:

- Early, catalytic investment and commitment from the George Gund Foundation
- Specific program-area expertise from all funders, particularly for social issues related to homelessness and child welfare
- Long-term interest in improving social service systems in Cuyahoga County

## LAURA AND JOHN ARNOLD FOUNDATION, THE REINVESTMENT FUND, NONPROFIT FINANCE FUND

### *Role: National Funders*

Two national Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) invested in Partnering for Family Success. The Laura and John Arnold Foundation funded the program's ramp-up. National funders were responsible for contributing the following resources:

- Critical investments to close the project
- Rigorous vetting of program model
- Due diligence methodologies
- Evaluation expertise
- PFS expertise



## CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

### *Role: Evaluator*

The Center on Urban Poverty & Community Development at the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences of Case Western Reserve University serves as Partnering for Family Success's project evaluator. Located in Cleveland, CWRU is an invaluable asset to the local nonprofit and social services community and contributed the following resources for the project:

- Integrated data holdings
- Critical technical evaluation expertise
- Issue-area expertise in child welfare
- Existing relationships with stakeholders

## THIRD SECTOR CAPITAL PARTNERS, INC.

### *Role: Government Advisor and Transaction Coordinator*

Cuyahoga County engaged Third Sector for feasibility analysis, and advisory for procurement design, selection, and construction. Third Sector contributed:

- Technical expertise in all aspects of PFS feasibility, procurement and construction
- Critical expertise related to PFS economic modeling
- Critical expertise related to PFS contracting
- Critical expertise in capital raise
- Day-to-day coordination and project management during project construction
- Objective third party perspective to drive difficult conversations and decisions
- Relationships with national CDFIs

## ENTERPRISE COMMUNITY PARTNERS, INC.

### *Role: Project Manager, Fiscal Agent, and Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)*

Enterprise was selected to serve as PFS intermediary and currently serves as project manager and fiscal agent during project implementation. Enterprise contributed the following resources to PFS:

- Appropriate structure to house SPV
- Critical legal and fiscal expertise
- Well-regarded reputation in local community as project manager and intermediary
- Existing relationships with all stakeholders
- Issue-area expertise in homelessness and supportive housing

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM CUYAHOGA COUNTY, THE GOVERNMENT CHAMPION?

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Cuyahoga County's exploration of PFS included nearly three years of preparatory work prior to Partnering for Family Success's launch in January 2015. The preparatory work included the PFS orientation and assembly of internal County stakeholders as well as potential external partner organizations. The internal stakeholders' orientation provided County management staff with background information on the PFS model generally and Partnering for Family Success specifically. These efforts helped prepare for necessary legislation relating to the County biennial budget process, procurement, contracting, and data sharing. This work was initiated by staff from the County Executive Office and drew in subject content experts from the County Law Department, Fiscal Office (Office of Budget and Management as well as Controllers Office), Sheriff's Office, Division of Children and Family Services, and Office of Homeless Services. Executive Office staff also worked with Cuyahoga County Council members and staff to ensure the County's legislature understood the goals of the exploration and the intent of the project.

Executive Office staff also engaged external organizations with a similar intent, and were successful in enlisting the support of foundations, provider organizations, and university programs as potential supporters of the project. The project development team was assembled among these internal and external stakeholders, and in this, the County shared decision making responsibility with its partners. For example, the County requested the input of local foundations in the development of its procurement, and staff from these area foundations were involved in the scoring of proposals and selection of projects for further evaluation. The County ensured a competitive procurement while including the input of partners, who would later be engaged as potential funders.

From the County's perspective, PFS held the potential to use a comprehensive solution to encourage government systems to work together to serve highly vulnerable populations. Prior to PFS, government systems worked separately to serve similar vulnerable populations. As David Merriman, Administrator of Job and Family Services in Cuyahoga County, notes, "Pay for Success changed the way we view program development and innovation. The creation of the Partnering for Family Success program enabled us to be truly outcomes focused, collaborative with funders and service providers on initiative design, and risk tolerant."

### MULTI-LEVEL LEADERSHIP

In pursuing a PFS project, the County learned that the process would require leadership and commitment from multiple levels and agencies within government. The project benefited from forward-thinking executive leadership from a former County Executive, who put his full, public support behind the prospect of PFS exploration. In addition, a project-champion within the Executive's Office devoted the time and resources necessary to move the project forward while navigating multiple facets of County government and the County legislature. The County Executive assigned the exploration work to a staff member that managed the executive's procurement and contract work, but who also had significant human service experience. That staff person continued with the PFS project as the exploration progressed and the project matured. At the start of the project, he committed 10-20% of his time to the PFS work, but by the contract development and negotiation phase, he was spending about 50% of his time on the project.

The Division of Children and Family Services employed internal resources to PFS construction and worked with the Executive Office to build a model that would address the unique needs of the child welfare population. DCFS participated in weekly team calls and many individual meetings with the CWRU evaluation team. The administrator of DCFS received briefs and participated in several management meetings on the project.

The time and resources spent by County staff during the exploration and various project stages was invaluable to the County, as it demonstrated a new project design strategy for human services. The multi-disciplinary team observed how the County's shared clients were not being effectively served through disconnected services and systems. Individually, these services supported the pursuit of positive outcomes (i.e. child safety and the end of homelessness) but their lack of coordination led clients to prioritize service engagement in ways that could produce unanticipated outcomes or diminished impact. For example, it was assumed that most homeless families had exhausted federal TANF funded cash assistance and, as a result, families scheduled to be reunified would not be able to use these resources to sustain reunification and housing. Through this project, staff matched public assistance and child welfare client data and found that very few families had in fact exhausted their eligibility; these clients could now apply or reapply for assistance. The improved stability families have after completing the program should allow them to take advantage of TANF funded job training and placement programs. The County is now reviewing policy changes to more effectively extend TANF resources to homeless families so they can maintain housing.

Later in project construction, a full-time PFS Coordinator with extensive expertise in child welfare and homelessness joined the County team and provided critical input on the design of the program intervention, operations, and referral processes. Stakeholders emphasize the importance of having dedicated staff join the project toward the second half of project construction. Not only did the PFS Coordinator provide valuable programmatic expertise and institutional knowledge to inform the details of the model, she also helped combat what stakeholders refer to as "project fatigue." After enduring countless conversations and sometimes-tense negotiations over the previous two years, stakeholders felt buoyed by an infusion of new staff with energy and a fresh perspective. The PFS Coordinator is stationed within the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services both for (i) the duration of the project and (ii) beyond the project to ensure long-term sustainability to core County government operations such as integrating data across multiple government systems. As such, this position was not funded as part of the financing of the PFS project, and the benefits of this type of coordination are expected well beyond the conclusion of the project. The PFS Coordinator continues to play a vital role in the project's operations as a liaison between the service-provider and DCFS and within different management levels of the agency.

## CLEAR FRAMING

The County also learned that focusing too heavily on the details and specifics of the financing mechanism could do the project a disservice when educating other County stakeholders. While some gravitated toward the financing details, the majority of stakeholders were more interested in the project's potential programmatic impact. First and foremost, policymakers wanted to know: why should Cuyahoga County pursue PFS and what can it accomplish? When stakeholders shifted the focus of its education efforts to the target population, FrontLine's intervention, and potential impact for families in Cuyahoga County, the project resonated more clearly and deeply.

## PHILANTHROPY AS A CATALYST

Cuyahoga County has a deep bench of philanthropic leaders and rich tradition of collaboration among funders. The Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program benefited immensely from the early involvement of the local funder community. One person at one foundation in particular, in fact, are recognized endearingly as the guardian of the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program. Marcia Egbert, Senior Program Officer at The George Gund Foundation planted the seed of Pay for Success exploration with the Cuyahoga County Executive and served as a catalyst and critical resource throughout the multiple years of project construction. Marcia Egbert instilled in stakeholders the idea that philanthropy is more than money. Her voice also helped to advance key County decisions. She advocated herself as a strong community supporter of the PFS project during various County Council meetings to help Council (i) approve the PFS contract for the project and (ii) approve the PFS legislative item to establish a fund for the County to make success payments. For the Cuyahoga County government, having a local funder at the table from the outset helped drive the project from brainstorm to execution.

## OUTSIDE EXPERTISE

Finally, the County's engagement of Third Sector Capital Partners, Inc. proved essential. Early on, Third Sector brought the specific PFS technical expertise required to identify social issue areas suitable for PFS in the County. Then, Third Sector helped the County to design a procurement according to key PFS criteria and helped the County to consider and evaluate procurement responses. During construction, Third Sector assembled an appropriate economic model and case for the County, pressed stakeholders to identify all necessary resources for the project, including housing and raising capital, and pushed stakeholders toward goals through diligent project management. The County also found benefit to the project in having a neutral arbiter from outside of the local community that could prompt difficult conversations among stakeholders during project construction.

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM FRONTLINE SERVICE, THE SERVICE PROVIDER?

FrontLine Service entered PFS exploration with eyes wide open: the organization had worked for decades with Cuyahoga County's most vulnerable populations, including its chronically homeless. FrontLine knew very well how challenging it is to serve homeless individuals who may also be living with mental health conditions, chronic physical conditions, or severe trauma. FrontLine also knew the daily battles their clients face to fight systemic barriers to stable housing, employment, mental and physical health care, and education. If PFS could help community leaders identify and break down these systemic barriers for their clients, then FrontLine was up to the challenge. As Eric Morse, Chief Operating Officer of FrontLine notes, "The PFS model allowed us to design an intervention that will measurably help children and families without the constraints of typical fee-for-service funding. Our staff is able to focus entirely on what they do best--building relationships with clients and driving toward outcomes."

### EXAMINING THE DETAILS

FrontLine learned that it needed dedicated staff earlier than expected during project construction to finalize the intervention design. Although FrontLine was already providing case management for homeless and formerly homeless families involved with the Division of Child and Family Services, the existing interventions focused mostly on housing stability and mental health treatment, rather than child welfare outcomes. Consequently, FrontLine needed to modify their existing interventions for this project to attenuate out of home placement days while continuing to support housing and mental health stability. While the FrontLine leadership team engaged in high-level negotiations over the PFS contract, the details of the intervention design needed attention. It was not until FrontLine secured a grant from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation (LJAF) to fund the ramp-up that the intervention design was finalized. LJAF funds allowed FrontLine to hire a PFS Project Manager with clinical expertise who could review the appropriate literature and conduct due diligence on the intervention. Specifically, the PFS Project Manager reviewed the scholarly literature and consulted with child welfare experts to confirm the factors related to positive child welfare outcomes for this population, which were housing stability, holistic service coordination, and services to address individual- and family-level trauma and other mental health concerns. The PFS Project Manager also consulted with experts on Critical Time Intervention, Trauma Adapted Family Connections, and Child Parent Psychotherapy to ensure that these evidence based practices would address housing stability, appropriate service coordination, and symptomatology with this population, as well as be theoretically consistent. With these details confirmed, FrontLine was comfortable signing off on the PFS contract. In hindsight, stakeholders could have anticipated the need for this technical expertise and worked to secure funding so that FrontLine could conduct due diligence on the intervention model earlier in the process.



"The PFS model allowed us to design an intervention that will measurably help children and families without the constraints of typical fee-for-service funding. Our staff is able to focus entirely on what they do best--building relationships with clients and driving toward outcomes."

- ERIC MORSE, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER OF FRONTLINE

## IMPORTANCE OF A RAMP-UP PERIOD

During project construction, FrontLine had two priority requests. The first request was to include a “ramp-up” phase that would allow FrontLine to test new clinical elements, hire and train staff and develop other operations before the project officially launched. FrontLine had extensive experience running evidence-based programs, and its leadership had the foresight to recognize that it would need time to hire and train staff, and to test new clinical elements before the agency was “on the clock” for the purposes of the PFS project’s evaluation. For example, during the recruiting process, FrontLine found that very few candidates had experience working with clients involved with both child welfare and homelessness. The ramp-up provided newly hired staff the opportunity to gain experience and competence addressing homelessness and child welfare issues simultaneously. Case management staff also needed to be trained in and practice Critical Time Intervention with a focus on housing stability and coordinating the DCFS case plan, which were new skills for these workers. And FrontLine therapists needed to be trained in and practice Trauma Adapted Family Connections and Child Parent Psychotherapy, which were new interventions for these workers and for FrontLine. FrontLine also found it necessary to modify their existing electronic medical records to be congruent with each of the evidence-based practices used in this project to enhance fidelity reviews.

Indeed, this ramp-up period proved critical not only for FrontLine, but for all stakeholders. During the ramp-up, FrontLine and DCFS case workers became familiar with the program and with each other and experimented with how best to approach shared PFS cases. At the beginning of the ramp-up, for example, FrontLine staff worked to engage the referred client as soon as possible, without necessarily waiting to discuss the case in detail with the DCFS case worker. Over time, partners learned that it was most important for the FrontLine case manager to have an in-depth discussion with the DCFS case worker before attempting to engage the client into the program. These discussions gave FrontLine staff a better sense of how to initiate the therapeutic relationship. In some cases, FrontLine staff learned from the DCFS case worker that the referred parent was ambivalent about regaining custody of their child(ren), and this influenced the way FrontLine staff discussed the program with potential new clients. FrontLine also built its relationships with housing providers and, most importantly, with Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority, which would provide housing to the majority of PFS clients.

The ramp-up period provided the opportunity for DCFS to practice the selection of potential families and coordinate the randomization process with CWRU. It also provided the opportunity to educate DCFS workers about PFS and the services that would be provided to their clients. In working on these cases, the PFS Coordinator was able to develop a strategy for working internally with case workers and management to ensure the PFS clients would have a path to safe reunification.

The ramp-up also allowed Enterprise Community Partners to officially step in to its role as project manager, and for CWRU to finalize the project’s evaluation plan. Stakeholders began bi-weekly meetings of the project’s Operating Committee. For FrontLine, Operating Committee meetings provided the opportunity to present real time data from the ramp-up, communicate challenges and successes, and seek collective problem-solving from stakeholders around the table.

Comparing data before and after project launch, stakeholders easily saw the value of this ramp-up period from an operations standpoint. On the housing front, for example, CMHA and FrontLine reduced by half the time between a client's enrollment in PFS and his/her housing application approval. The ramp-up also allowed FrontLine the ability to test its menu of interventions, some of which were new to FrontLine staff. FrontLine determined during this time that one intervention it had previously planned to utilize was superfluous. After consulting with Operating Committee members during regular meetings, FrontLine saved precious time and resources and officially dropped the intervention from its PFS service delivery model before project launch.

### **FLEXIBLE FUNDS**

Apart from the ramp-up, FrontLine's second priority request centered on the PFS program budget. Looking ahead into the operations of PFS, FrontLine saw the need for ample discretionary funds for client assistance. These flexible dollars would give FrontLine case workers the ability to support clients during the first phase of engagement: Critical Time Intervention (CTI). The evidence-based model of CTI requires intensive case management at the outset of engagement that tapers over time as clients reach greater stability and are connected to community-based resources. FrontLine needed access to a pool of flexible dollars that could support the myriad unanticipated client needs during CTI that would help families stabilize, including groceries, a new identification card, or payment of a back-balance on a utility bill.

Securing a sufficient budget for clinical training on each new intervention as well as resilience training was equally important to FrontLine. FrontLine had enough experience working with vulnerable populations to know that its staff would face extreme physical, emotional, and intellectual challenges each day. FrontLine's PFS Program Manager pushed stakeholders to ensure his staff would be well paid for their extraordinary efforts, and provided the clinical support they needed to avoid the second-hand trauma and burnout that is so common among community-based service providers. Though still early in the project, this attention to staff support has paid off. FrontLine has retained the same team of case workers and therapists for the first year of the project.

### **BUILD NEW PARTNERSHIPS**

FrontLine also learned that PFS provides an opportunity to build new partnerships. During construction, the project team identified the need to include housing partners and resources. The housing partners, Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority, Emerald Development Economic Network, Inc. and Famicos Foundation, were integral to the project because they provided housing units that help to stabilize the project's caregivers with their child(ren). Once the team identified the housing partners, FrontLine worked closely with the housing partners to identify housing units eligible for the project and to create processes that would prioritize housing units for the project's families. Ultimately, FrontLine and the housing partners built new partnerships that transitioned to project implementation.



## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIRD SECTOR CAPITAL PARTNERS, THE GOVERNMENT ADVISOR, AND ENTERPRISE COMMUNITY PARTNERS, THE INTERMEDIARY?

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For the project's advisor and transaction coordinator, launching the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program provided Third Sector with many lessons, including a lesson in the value of collaboration and the necessity of consistent project management and PFS technical expertise. Third Sector's Co-Founder and Co-President expresses, "Cuyahoga County presented us with an opportunity to help a county explore PFS for the first time. There were no other county-level PFS projects at the time, and the leadership and innovation from the Cuyahoga County community made us believe that Cuyahoga County could serve as a catalyst and national example to local communities."

### RESPECT EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS

In its role as advisor to Cuyahoga County, Third Sector quickly recognized that it had entered a tight-knit community. Local stakeholders had, in some cases, relationships that stretched back multiple decades. Local stakeholders entered PFS exploration with a high degree of mutual respect for each other and committed early on to "do no harm" to existing relationships. Recognizing the value of this collaborative environment, Third Sector navigated project construction among local stakeholders and recognized that it could provide valuable outside perspective and objective PFS technical expertise. The Third Sector team quickly learned when to best leverage local resources and expertise during the process, and when its experience would be most valuable. From feasibility through project construction, Third Sector kept stakeholders on task with regular phone calls and focused on the next milestone.

### UNDERSTAND AND NAVIGATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROCESSES

Third Sector learned through the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program that local and County-level projects could include more approval processes within government than state-level projects. Getting clear, as early as possible, on each of the specific steps needed to finalize a project is a must for organizations and advisors interested in exploring local PFS initiatives. This due diligence also includes recognizing which officials, staff, and stakeholders within and outside of government need to be educated on the project and whose support is required to move forward.

### ENGAGE PROJECT MANAGER EARLY

In March 2014, the County selected Enterprise Community Partners to house the SPV and serve as the Project Manager and fiscal agent. Securing the Project Manager role as early as possible during project construction proved incredibly beneficial. Having this structure in place—with the resources of a national organization like Enterprise included—was helpful when Third Sector had to raise capital with potential funders and work with funders during their due diligence processes. Given the role of the Project Manager in providing overall oversight to the project during implementation, it was a priority for funders to feel comfortable with the Project Manager during their due diligence efforts.

## POWER OF LOCAL FUNDERS AND PHILANTHROPY

From inception to launch, Third Sector immediately recognized the value that the George Gund Foundation brought to the development of PFS in Cuyahoga County. During PFS construction, Marcia Egbert helped Third Sector navigate through early conversations with Enterprise for the role of the Project Manager, with the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority, and with local funders such as Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland, and the Cleveland Foundation in gaining comfort around their potential roles as funders for the project. As Third Sector's Co-Founder and Co-President succinctly expresses, "Working with a local funder is key. Without the George Gund Foundation's innovation and early commitment to explore PFS, Third Sector might have not had the opportunity to help explore and bring Cuyahoga County's first PFS project to launch."

## LOCAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT

It was important to community stakeholders that the project manager role was occupied by a familiar and well-respected organization who would be engaged and present before, during, and after the project's duration. As a local partner, Enterprise would have a stake not only in the success of the PFS project, but also in achieving long-lasting improvements to Cuyahoga's social services safety net as a whole.

## SECURE FUNDERS, CLOSE THE PROJECT

In an ideal project world, PFS projects close after having secured all funder commitments. In reality, the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program PFS Contract was signed without the commitment of a senior funder. Stakeholders recall how tremendously stressful the time period was between project closing and final commitment from The Reinvestment Fund. As Mark McDermott of Enterprise succinctly recommends, "close the project with all your funders in place, it will save headaches and bring everyone to the finish line with a high morale."

The Reinvestment Fund joined the project during the last couple of months of the project's construction once the PFS Contract had been signed. TRF was interested in having their organization involved in PFS and the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program was their first opportunity to do so. TRF quickly became supportive of the project, its stakeholders, and was able to move forward with a due diligence and loan agreement contracting processes as the senior funder. TRF serves as an example to other funders, particularly CDFIs, who are interested in funding PFS projects.



"Cuyahoga County presented us with an opportunity to help a county explore PFS for the first time. There were no other county-level PFS projects at the time, and the leadership and innovation from the Cuyahoga County community made us believe that Cuyahoga County could serve as a catalyst and national example to local communities."

— CAROLINE WHISTLER, THIRD SECTOR'S CO-FOUNDER AND CO-PRESIDENT

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE FUNDERS?

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The Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program benefited from a combination of local and national funders that brought complementary perspectives and assets to the stakeholders.

### FUNDERS BRING MORE TO THE PROJECT THAN JUST MONEY

Thankfully for the stakeholders, local funders came to the table willing to roll up their sleeves. Marcia Egbert at the George Gund Foundation learned early on that she could provide much more than a Program Related Investment to help the project move forward. It was at Marcia's initial encouragement that the County began exploring PFS, and the George Gund Foundation provided the resources to engage Third Sector as this exploration grew more committed to the construction of a project. The County and stakeholders could rely on the Gund Foundation to serve as liaison to the local funding community. As a funder herself, Marcia directly addressed questions and concerns from funder colleagues, and leveraged long-term relationships to pique the interest of the project's other two local funders, The Cleveland Foundation and Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland.

Local funders also learned that the County and other stakeholders could use the group's extensive issue-area expertise in child welfare, housing and homelessness, and program-related investments to inform the program design.

Given the diverse time and resource investment they were making, funders recognized the value for the project in implementing a ramp-up period. Though there were slight differences between the ramp-up and full project operations, funders could largely observe the program in motion more than three months prior to project launch. This proved helpful in both finalizing funder commitments and observing progress during the first year of project operations.

### LOOK FOR EXISTING COLLABORATIONS, ESPECIALLY INVOLVEMENT FROM LOCAL FUNDERS

From the national funder perspective, Nonprofit Finance Fund and The Reinvestment Fund learned that investing in communities with an existing collaborative culture was much easier than trying to create partnerships from scratch. National funders also recognize that stakeholders who are not collaborative during project construction will likely stay that way during implementation.

For the project's senior funder, The Reinvestment Fund, the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program represented the CDFI's first investment in a PFS project. This serves as a lesson learned that PFS projects should not rely on commercial funders always taking the role of the senior funder --- CDFI's can also play the role. For both the Reinvestment Fund and Nonprofit Finance Fund, the Cuyahoga project presented an opportunity for both TRF and NFF to "dip their toes in PFS" and to explore the larger roles that CDFIs could play in the PFS field.

## ANTICIPATE LEGAL EXPENSE

None of the stakeholders anticipated the amount of legal counsel needed to finalize the PFS contract. There had only been one PFS contract created prior to the Cuyahoga project, and there were several key negotiation points that varied from Cuyahoga in comparison to other PFS projects. While stakeholders rose to the occasion with in-house expertise or pro-bono legal counsel, having an experienced transaction lawyer to work on behalf of the project during project construction would have helped stakeholders immensely in the negotiations of the second PFS contract in the field.

## SHARE MOTIVATIONS AND RISK TOLERANCE

The project allowed funders to openly discuss and share their motivations for participating in the project. Funders had various motivations ranging from a desire to fund projects to scale the PFS field, fund innovative projects in social issue areas such as foster care and homelessness, and fund projects serving the Cuyahoga County community. The project also allowed funders to negotiate the level of payment risk that each funder was willing to face in the project. The funders agreed to provide upfront funding at various points throughout the project and agreed to a waterfall for receiving success payments.

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE EVALUATOR?

The stakeholders had the benefit of having a nationally-ranked research university with expertise in child welfare in their own backyard. As the program's evaluator, David Crampton, PhD, Associate Professor at Case Western Reserve University's Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences (MSASS) was engaged and enthusiastic about the project from the outset. Crampton noted, "Given our longstanding commitment to and expertise in understanding the consequences of urban poverty, we were eager to contribute to this effort targeting child abuse and homelessness. The prospect of leveraging new funding to test an innovative model was compelling to us."



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- DAVID CRAMPTON, PHD, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY'S JACK, JOSEPH AND MORTON MANDEL SCHOOL OF APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCES

<sup>4</sup> More information on the CHILD Data System available at <http://povertycenter.case.edu/data-systems/child-data-system/>

## **INVEST IN INTEGRATED DATA SYSTEMS NOW**

The Center on Urban Poverty & Community Development has a longstanding relationship with the Cuyahoga Division of Children and Families that included a collaboration on the ChildHood Integrated Longitudinal Data (CHILD) system. CHILD is a secure, private system consisting of linked administrative records from 16 different systems covering children in Cuyahoga County that stretches from 1992 to present. CWRU used CHILD for its preliminary research on the PFS referral population.<sup>4</sup> These databases helped CWRU identify the project's target group, the associated needs of that group, and the potential financial value of serving the target group more effectively.

This preliminary research, as CWRU learned, was time consuming and the results were needed before sufficient funds for the research became available. The CWRU team was grateful for the support of the Laura and John Arnold Foundation in the latter half of 2014 whose grant funded the project ramp-up at FrontLine and CWRU's research needed to finalize the evaluation plan. In retrospect, however, stakeholders acknowledge that CWRU's referral analysis and target population research would have been easier to conduct during the feasibility phase of the project – with the appropriate compensation to CWRU – rather than during project construction. Better sequencing this research would have provided both more time, and alleviated stress for CWRU researchers. Driven by a passion for their work and commitment to helping child-welfare involved children and families, CWRU conducted research without the assurance of knowing whether it would get compensated for its efforts or what the depth and scope of the preliminary research would entail.

Notwithstanding the many hours David and his colleagues spent knee-deep in administrative data, CWRU's foresight and previous work establishing the CHILD system had shaved months off the project's construction phase. Rob Fischer, Ph.D., research professor on the PFS evaluation team, offered, "Over the last 15 years we had been working to integrate local administrative data at the individual level. This allowed us to develop data sharing agreements with a range of public and nonprofit entities and provide analyses to inform policy and practices. Over time we have built these relationships. Once local partners saw they could trust us to keep the data confidential and interpret the data correctly, the relationships became institutionalized. This positioned us well to step into the PFS work and use the data to aid in target population definition and clarify the potential PFS program impact."

## **PLAN A PROCESS FOR OBTAINING CONSENT**

FrontLine and CWRU found that obtaining consent from PFS clients for participation in the PFS evaluation was relatively easy if approached as a team effort. At DCFS, the PFS Coordinator worked with clients and case workers at the agency to ensure all parties were oriented to the program prior to client engagement. This included an overview of program's evaluation and service components. At the point of engagement then, CTI-case managers at FrontLine were able to reiterate the program overview and seek formal consent for participation in the evaluation. By and large, FrontLine case workers found that families were hopeful that their participation may improve services for others. Moreover, clients knew of CWRU and viewed the institution favorably; this good reputation in the community garnered trust and goodwill from clients when making a decision about whether to provide consent. As of the date of this report, all clients approached were willing to provide consent for participation in the evaluation.

## ENSURE FLEXIBILITY

A lesson learned in developing the Cuyahoga County PFS is that a rigorous evaluation proposal should allow real-time knowledge to inform the methodology. Plainly said, contracts should allow for flexibility in making modifications to the sample and evaluation design.

Following Partnering for Family Success's official launch in January 2015, this flexibility proved particularly critical in ensuring the program was reaching the population it was meant to serve. Soon after randomization started, a review of individual DCFS cases revealed that the initial criteria to determine simultaneous housing instability and entry into foster care was too narrow. Information accessible in case notes showed that caregivers who had registered homeless episodes as far back as 12 months prior to entrance into foster care were still facing housing instability. Furthermore, the level of instability was comparable to those families defined by the initial criteria which looked for entries into the homeless database within a three month window of entry into foster care.

On the methodological side, CWRU had to find a way to account for censoring. Censoring is the reality that spells of foster care and homelessness may be ongoing but not observed in a specific window of time. The project called for estimating treatment effects from a randomized controlled trial five years post- intervention with data on individuals that spanned three to five years. Two alternative methods were proposed to account for censoring along with considerations that would allow the selection of the more appropriate method based on future data collection.

Thankfully, flexibility built into the Cuyahoga PFS contract allowed including alternative methodology approaches to censoring. And following approval from the PFS Governance Committee and funders, CWRU adjusted the criteria for eligibility into randomization.

## HOW CAN WE MOVE FORWARD WITH CUYAHOGA'S LESSONS LEARNED?

For those familiar with the evolving PFS landscape, it is unsurprising that launching Partnering for Family Success was a case study in intensive commitment and collaboration. PFS Projects are not easy, and this certainly held true in Cuyahoga. Partners have learned, however, that the work is tremendously valuable when all parties move beyond the project's launch and get to work serving the clients and the community that brought partners together in the first place.

To be sure, the story of Partnering for Family Success has more chapters yet to be written. But from the early days of feasibility assessment, stakeholders in Cuyahoga County have maintained a commitment to transparency. Stakeholders share lessons learned and speak candidly about successes and pitfalls so that other communities can pursue viable PFS projects more efficiently, and are well informed of the time and resources required to close a project.

**For further questions related to the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program, please contact Carrie Wagner, Program Officer at Enterprise Community Partners, Inc. at [cwagner@enterprisecommunity.org](mailto:cwagner@enterprisecommunity.org).**

## APPENDIX: WHAT WAS THE EVOLUTION OF THE CUYAHOGA PARTNERING FOR FAMILY SUCCESS PROGRAM?

Constructing PFS projects requires significant leadership and time commitment from all project parties involved. Exhibit X below illustrates the evolution of the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program. After FrontLine and Case Western Reserve University were selected in December 2013 as the provider and evaluator for the project, it took 12 months to construct the project. This appendix outlines how the Partnering for Family Success project evolved from the beginning and highlights key achievements during the feasibility, procurement, and project development phases.

<i>The Beginning of PFS Exploration in Cuyahoga County, OH</i>	
<b>JULY 2011</b>	With support from Cleveland-based George Gund Foundation, Cuyahoga County first began exploring PFS in July 2011. One year later, Third Sector Capital Partners (Third Sector) presented at a local public gathering on advancing PFS. Following this initial exploration, the previous County Executive, Ed FitzGerald, decided to include PFS as part of the Human Service Needs principle in his Western Reserve Plan, a broader plan to reshape the County's Health and Human Services delivery in Cuyahoga County.
<i>The George Gund Foundation and Cuyahoga County Engages Third Sector</i>	
<b>AUG. 2012</b>	Again leveraging Gund Foundation support, the County formally engaged Third Sector to complete a feasibility analysis in August 2012. By October 2012, Third Sector had identified priority social issue areas conducive to PFS for the County. These social issue areas included, but were not limited to, child welfare and youth mental and behavioral health. As this analysis advanced, Ed Fitzgerald announced his intention to explore PFS publicly in a February 2012 State of the County address.
<i>Launch of the First County-level Procurement</i>	
<b>OCT. 2012</b>	<p>Later that year, the county launched the nation's first County-level PFS procurement with the help of Third Sector. The county released a formal Request for Responses (RFR) and initiated a competitive process focused on finding social service providers, evaluators, and other project partners for a PFS project. The RFR indicated the County's particular interest in adolescent behavioral health and child welfare, but did not exclude responses that targeted other populations or interventions. The procurement process took fifteen-months from RFR design to selection, and included a three-day community listening session. The County sought responses that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressed a well-defined problem;</li> <li>• Targeted a well-defined population;</li> <li>• Utilized evidence-based interventions with measurable outcomes; and</li> <li>• Realized cashable savings for the County government and a potential return for funders.</li> </ul>
<i>First County-level PFS Project Construction Begins</i>	
<b>DEC. 2013</b>	In December 2013, the County selected a proposal from community-based mental health provider, FrontLine Service, (FrontLine) to serve homeless families with involvement in the child welfare system. The County also selected a proposal from the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development at the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University (Case) as the lead evaluator in its first PFS project.
<i>Enterprise Community Partners, Inc. Joins as Project Manager</i>	
<b>APRIL 2014</b>	In the spring of 2013, after a series of conversations between Third Sector, the George Gund Foundation, and Enterprise Community Partners, Inc. (Enterprise), Enterprise committed to engaging in the project as the Project Manager, Fiscal Agent and to creating the Special Purpose Vehicle.



<i>Introduction of County-level PFS Legislation</i>	
<b>JULY 2014</b>	In June 2014, then-County Executive announced that he would submit legislation to establish a \$5 million dollar Social Impact Financing Fund, a sinking fund for the project. County Councilman Dale Miller, District 2, co-sponsored the legislation. The legislation was voted by Council and passed in July 2014.
<i>Case Western Identifies Target Population, Outcome Metric, &amp; Creates Evaluation Plan</i>	
<b>JUNE 2014</b>	After 7 months of conducting research on the target populations in both the County's homeless and foster care systems, Case identified the project's target populations as 135 homeless or housing insecure families with children in temporary out-of-home placement (foster care). Case also worked with project partners to finalize the project's outcome metric (a reduction in out-of-home placement days for the children of the targeted families). Case created the evaluation design for the project as a randomized controlled trial with a total of 270 families, 135 to be placed and evaluated in the control group, and 135 families to be evaluated in the treatment group.
<i>Launch of the First PFS Ramp-Up</i>	
<b>JUNE 2014</b>	In June 2014, the Ramp-up period for the project was also announced. The Ramp-up officially began on July 1st, 2014 and concluded in October 2015. The Ramp-up was made possible through a \$780,000 grant from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation (LJAF). The philanthropic grant supported FrontLine Service, Inc. (FrontLine), in serving 33 mothers who experienced homelessness and had at least one child placed in foster care. The Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program was the first PFS project to embed a Ramp-up period.
<i>Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority Creates Public Housing Preference for PFS</i>	
<b>SEPT. 2014</b>	From February to September 2014, the project explored and underwent special approval processes in order to commit housing resources for the families to be served by the project. In July 2014, the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) underwent a housing preference approval process to create a new public housing high priority preference for families interested in participating in the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program. The housing preference approval process included a thirty-day public comment period and final approval from CMHA's board of Commissioners. By September 2014, Famicos Foundation and Economic Development & Economic Network, Inc. (EDEN) also committed housing resources for the project.
<i>Council Approves the Pay for Success Contract</i>	
<b>OCT. 2014</b>	From July to October 2014, Enterprise Community Partners, the County, and FrontLine with advisory from Third Sector, drafted and created the PFS contract. for the project. After a series of review sessions, the PFS contract was formally approved by Cuyahoga County's Council in October 2014.
<i>Project Team Announces at National Conference on PFS</i>	
<b>DEC. 2014</b>	In early December 2014, the project team formally announced the project at a national conference on PFS hosted by Nonprofit Finance Fund and the White House Office of Social Innovation,
<i>All Funder and Project Agreements are Finalized and Project is Launched</i>	
<b>DEC. 2014</b>	In December 2014, after a year of conversations and varying due diligence processes, Third Sector finalized formal commitments from the project's funders— The Reinvestment Fund, Nonprofit Finance Fund, the George Gund Foundation, the Cleveland Foundation, and Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland. The funders negotiated and entered into formal lender and grant agreements in December 2014. All other project agreements, including with Case, Enterprise, and Third Sector, were finalized in December 2014. Once all project agreements were finalized, the project team publicly announced the launch of the project in Cleveland in late December 2014.

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