



**FAQ:  
THE CUYAHOGA PARTNERING FOR FAMILY SUCCESS PROGRAM**

**What is the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program (PFS)?**

In 2015, Cuyahoga County launched Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success, the nation’s first county-level Pay for Success project in the combined areas of homelessness and child welfare.

**What is Pay for Success?**

Pay for Success is an innovative funding model that expands available funding for nonprofit service providers and tracks the effectiveness of programs over time to ensure funding is directed toward programs that succeed in measurably improving the lives of people most in need. Governments that use a Pay for Success model have greater resources to tackle social problems by tapping into private investments for the upfront costs of the programs.

**What was the purpose of Cuyahoga PFS?**

Cuyahoga PFS was structured to deliver intensive treatment to families over four and a half years with the aim of reducing the length of stay in out-of-home foster care placement for children whose families are homeless and housing insecure.

**Why was the program needed?**

For children in out-of-home foster care to be reunited with their families, their caregivers must be able to provide a safe and stable home environment. Unfortunately, many such caregivers are homeless or housing insecure and struggle with domestic violence, substance abuse and mental illness and are in need of critical services to address these issues in order to safely care for their children. As a result, children from these families spend significantly longer periods in out-of-home foster care and are left profoundly impacted by the loss of consistent caregivers.

The conventional child welfare system lacked adequate service and agency collaboration to help families access housing services.

**Who were the partners in the program?**

- **Child Welfare Provider:** Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services
- **Service Provider:** FrontLine Service. FrontLine Service is a nonprofit agency that operates a comprehensive continuum of care for individuals and families who are homeless, in psychiatric crisis, or traumatized by violence, serving more than 25,000 adults and children each year.
- **Housing Providers:** The Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority (primary housing provider) and

Emerald Development and Economic Network, Inc. These organizations provided public housing and voucher-based housing resources, respectively, for the program's families.

- **Referral Partners:** Referrals came primarily from the HMIS database and the County's Division of Children and Family Services, a small number of referrals were provided by the Domestic Violence and Child Advocacy Center, a social service provider that provides housing shelter for female caregivers who experience domestic violence.
- **Project Manager & Fiscal Agent:** Enterprise Community Partners, Inc., a national nonprofit organization dedicated to creating opportunity for low and moderate-income people through affordable housing in diverse, thriving communities.
- **Government Payer:** County of Cuyahoga, Ohio
- **Government Advisor & Transaction Coordinator:** Third Sector Capital Partners, Inc., a 501c3 nonprofit organization that is transforming the way communities connect people with human services by collaborating with governments, service providers, and their partners to generate positive outcomes for the people they serve. Since 2011, we have worked with more than 40 communities and transitioned over \$800 million in public funding to social programs that measurably improve lives.
- **Local Funders:** The George Gund Foundation, The Cleveland Foundation and The Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland.
- **National Funders:** Reinvestment Fund and Nonprofit Finance Fund. Reinvestment Fund is a national mission-driven financial institution that creates opportunity for underserved people and places through partnerships. Nonprofit Finance Fund promotes the success of nonprofits by providing capital, strategic consulting, and using our knowledge and influence to transform the funding and financing landscape.
- **Independent Evaluator:** The Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU), a leading research center that used its integrated child welfare and homelessness data systems to help the county, FrontLine and Third Sector Capital Partners, Inc. identify the size, characteristics and potential cost savings associated with the program's target families. CWRU also conducted an independent evaluation of the program.

### **What partners funded the program?**

A consortium of five funders provided upfront funding of \$4 million for the program:

- **Reinvestment Fund** provided \$1,575,000 in senior loan funding at 5% interest.
- **The George Gund Foundation** provided \$1,000,000 in subordinate loan funding at 2% interest for \$725,000 and at 0% interest for \$275,000.
- **Nonprofit Finance Fund** provided \$325,000 in subordinate loan funding at 2% interest.
- **The Cleveland Foundation** provided \$750,000 in subordinate loan funding at 2% interest.
- **The Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland** provided two \$75,000 recoverable grants and \$200,000 in subordinate loan funding at 2% interest.

### **How did the program work?**

In partnership with the program's housing partners, FrontLine linked each caregiver to housing and delivered an evidence-based case management model known as Critical Time Intervention (CTI). CTI helps vulnerable families that have experienced homelessness to reconnect to community support networks and settle successfully in stable housing.

In addition, CTI was paired with age-appropriate, evidence-based trauma services that strengthen healthy and secure caregiver-child relationships. FrontLine's services were designed to reduce the time children spend in out-of-home foster care by stabilizing the family's home environment and increasing family

reunification success.

Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority and Emerald Development and Economic Network, Inc (EDEN) provided public housing and/or voucher-based housing resources for the program's families. CMHA created a high-priority public housing preference for caregivers enrolled in the program to get them housed faster.

### **Who did the program serve?**

Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success delivered intensive treatment to 135 families, with the goal to reduce the length of stay in out-of-home foster care placement for children whose families had a history of homelessness or housing instability. Nearly half of the children in the program were under the age of five when they were taken into county custody. 69% of families reported they experienced domestic violence.

### **What is the impact of the program?**

As a result of the program:

- 118 of families have been stably housed; not every family needed housing support
- 46 caregivers participated in substance use treatment
- 69 caregivers took advantage of mental health treatment

African-American caregivers in the Cuyahoga PFS program were reunified with their children at a higher rate than both white families in the Cuyahoga PFS program and African-American families who received conventional county services. Specifically, 69% of African-American children who exited care reunified with their families, versus 55% of African-American children receiving conventional services.

### **Why did African-American families in the Cuyahoga PFS program reunify at a higher rate?**

A qualitative evaluation of the program showed how incredibly valuable FrontLine's services were to families who received them. FrontLine's assistance with housing supports, skill development, client advocacy and empowerment, and inspiring hope were shown to be critical to caregiver progress toward family reunification.

The involvement of FrontLine staff resulted in more effective advocacy on behalf of African-American families that helped them make better progress on their case plans.

It also is likely that African-American caregivers were more responsive to the treatment because they felt it helped them overcome the feeling that their odds for reunification were low. This sense of hopefulness for caregivers is a powerful asset to maintaining progress on a case plan and stabilizing their home and personal situations.

### **Did the program meet its metric?**

When the program was designed, it had only one specific metric to determine if the County would need to make repayment to the funders – a practice that has evolved during the last five years and is now an industry standard to include multiple metrics to trigger success payments.

The program's target impact was a 25% reduction in out-of-home placement days for the treated population. At this level of impact, all funders would be repaid their principal investment and base annual interest with a small success payment on top of that.

The program's impact on out-of-home placement days was evaluated by CWRU and completed in early 2020. This independent evaluation showed that there was no significant difference in the number of days children were in out-of-home placement between the group who received PFS services and the group who received conventional county services. Cuyahoga County would have paid \$75 per reduced foster care day to the investors, which represents the County's combined average cost of foster care and related placement services. Because that metric was not reached, no payments were due from the county.

### **Why was there no reduction in the length of stay in the group receiving PFS program services?**

In this program, the sole metric focused on children exiting care quickly, with no explicit focus on how they exited: whether a child exited to reunification, adoption, or legal custody was not a primary consideration under the payable metric.

In practice and by policy, however, all child welfare agencies are required to begin by making "reasonable efforts" to work toward reunification if this can provide a safe and permanent option for the child. But reunification takes time.

Throughout the process, the County staff examined and pursued all possible alternative solutions for the child's exit from care. If families were making enough progress, it lengthened some children's length of stays in care while family reunification was still pursued.

### **What happens next?**

We believe we have found a promising alternative solution to help reunify African-American families who have a history of housing instability. The County is proposing to fund the program for another year, with an additional option year possible, to determine if this approach continues to work better for African-American families. African-American families are disproportionately represented in Cuyahoga County's child welfare system. Thirty percent of children across the Cuyahoga County are African American, but 64% of the children in foster care are African American. It is rare to see a child welfare program that is more effective in serving African American children, so it is exciting that the PFS program was able to reunify African American children at a higher rate. PFS can therefore contribute to local and national concerns about the over-representation of African American children in foster care.

All partners are using lessons learned during the last five years to improve their own policies and practices. As organizations that support children and families, we have learned how to work together more effectively to the benefit of Cuyahoga County families.