



a program of Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

## PROJECT EVERLAST LINCOLN YEAR ONE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### VISION

Project Everlast seeks to help youth with foster care experience ages 14-24 establish connections to supports and lifelong relationships that help them envision a bright future, make progress toward their goals, and successfully transition to adulthood.

### MISSION

Project Everlast brings together young people, public agencies, private funders, private providers, business partners, and concerned citizens to create a supportive community that is committed to improving

### FOCUS

Project Everlast concentrates its' work in seven key areas: Permanence, Education, Employment, Housing, Physical and Mental Health, Personal and Community Engagement and Economic Success.

### STRATEGIES

The strategies for Project Everlast are modeled after the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Theory of Change: Youth Engagement; Partnerships and Resources; Research, Evaluation, and Communications; Public Will and Policy; and Increased Youth Opportunities.

## Project Everlast Lincoln Year One Accomplishments

*Backbone Support:* Collaboration doesn't just "happen." It requires some infusion of resources with attention to the business of moving the effort forward. This allows the community partners to do what they do best, provide services within the community.

*Accomplishments:* A Transition Team was chartered, meeting monthly, comprised of managers and staff of partnering organizations. A Leadership Team was chartered, meeting quarterly with the Transition Team members, comprised of top management of key service agencies and invested funders. Subcommittees were not formed as anticipated around topical areas. Instead already existing teams or developing teams in the community were contacted, joined and through this process are taking on goals and actions of the plan. These groups are: the Youth Subcommittee of the Continuum of Care—focus housing, the Employment Roundtable being formed and led by CEDARS—focus education and employment. While we had several meetings of a small group focused on Health, we decided to instead merge this membership with the transition team while learning more about what may exist on this topic in the community. Additionally, connections are being made with Region 5's System of Care planning team to address needs specific to mental health and substance abuse.

Financial Support was another key activity of the backbone organization. Funding from government sources and private philanthropy external and internal to Lincoln were sought and are being braided to support the Project Everlast collective effort. (See attached summary). Contracts were developed to provide specific services and build capacity for the organization. The Transition team members identified their strengths and primary population focus, through this group process a coordinated system of referral and shared resources was established with the HUB providing central access and while still being developed coordinated data collection for measuring progress and outcome achieved through the collective work of all partners. (See attached diagram of collaborative process).

Finally, constant easy access to information was enhanced through the Project Everlast website. Visit [www.projecteverlast.org](http://www.projecteverlast.org) and select "Lincoln." This is a work in progress but great gains have been made.

*Outcome Areas:* Housing, Transportation and Basic Needs

### GOAL: Promote efficient, real time, information sharing.

*Accomplishments:* A resource database specific to Lincoln has been developed for the community to use on the Project Everlast website. It is organized for easy navigation and written in a conversational manner directed at youth. Each topical area contains links to more detailed information that already existed in the community. Visit [www.projecteverlast.org](http://www.projecteverlast.org). Click on "Lincoln" and quickly connect to information about locating child care, transportation, supports for furthering one's education, and healthcare. Additional topic summaries are being created.

The youth subcommittee of Lincoln's Continuum of Care held a resource fair on October 21st at the Bay. In attendance were 19 community agencies and 100 youth. Agencies that's participated included Matt Talbot Kitchen, LPS, PALS, Planned Parenthood, Family Services, Bike Kitchen, Region 5, Nebraska Appleseed, The Bay, Project Everlast, Fresh Start, SNAP, the HUB, EducationQuest, Cedars Street Outreach, Safe Place and the People's City Mission. This first initial fair laid out the groundwork for hosting these fairs annually.

## GOAL: Ease access to safe, stable, affordable housing by building relationships with landlords.

*Accomplishments:* Project Everlast staff are members of the youth subcommittee for the Housing Continuum of Care and are involved in discussions regarding removing barriers to housing for youth created by landlord bias, criminal history, lack of cosigners, and poor credit history.

Community partners are using RentWise curriculum and scheduling specific trainings for a youth audience. Upon the youth's completion of RentWise they will receive a \$300 stipend to be used for housing costs. The youth council selected this incentive as the "selected assistance for youth" made possible through WIN funds.

One suggested activity of the plan was "sharing a list of landlords who rent to youth 18+." Agencies providing supported housing and rental assistance have invested much in maintaining trusting relationships between the agency sponsor and community landlords. This has included helping to pay damages to property to maintain such relationships. A shared "list of landlords" was not a viable approach, instead this goal is being achieved through the Transition Team's coordination of services and sharing resources available in the community.

## GOAL: Clarify definition of homelessness among HUD and private agencies.

Not yet addressed, will require examination of definitions established at the federal level.

*Outcome Area:* Permanence

## GOAL: Increase use of family finding activities among service providers

*Accomplishments:* In February 2014, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services invited other community partners to training in the evidence based practice of "Family Finding" with national consultant Kevin Campbell. Christian Heritage has been providing this service through a contract with DHHS and has been achieving promising results. Nebraska Children has negotiated a contract with Christian Heritage to assist with Family Finding for youth and young adults in the Southeast Service Area. Additional funding has allowed Christian Heritage to increase their capacity for delivering this service by hiring one additional staff effective May/June 2014.

## GOAL: Increase access to emotional support services needed to build relationships.

*Accomplishments:* Project Everlast youth council continues to provide one avenue for connecting youth and young adults to one another through an informal setting. The council utilizes a speaker's bureau and leadership training to empower youth and provide an avenue for informing other systems and professionals on the importance of youth voice and choice in decision-making regarding their best interests. Building social networks, access to positive adults, avenues for experiencing success, offering opportunity to earn money for their time and contributions are all part of skill-building for these youth on relationship development and builds self-confidence.

As mentioned previously, increased capacity for family finding lends itself to achieving this goal as youth add to their "circle of people."

The Mental Health Association (MHA) holds peer training on a Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP) for persons living with mental illness. Peer to peer support and the strategy of WRAP has shown great promise in better supporting people in recovery. Additional connections are being made between Project Everlast and MHA's peer support approach.

*Outcome Area:* Education

## GOAL: Educate the educators. Increase access to tools, training and services, for youth and educators, needed to ensure a young person's educational success.

*Accomplishments:* In March 2014, Project Everlast staff met with leadership from the Center for People in Need. The Access to Computer Technology (ACT) program is an excellent resource for the community. Through a generous donor, 45 hours of coursework, a laptop and internet service is provided to eligible recipients who wish to attend Southeast Community College. Project Everlast is working to connect youth to resources for affordable ACT/SAT prep through links on the Project Everlast website. Information on a number of other opportunities have been compiled and can be found at [www.projecteverlast.org](http://www.projecteverlast.org) "link-education" page.

April 2014 Project Everlast met with the LPS Administrator of School Counselors and Social Workers. Subsequently, we sent requested print materials for distribution to all school counselors. The Employment Roundtable subgroup will continue to make connections with community systems to better streamline efforts toward accessing education and employment in the community.

Tutoring services are available through LPS, Southeast Community College and many other community providers. A challenge is helping a young person know the assistance is available. Online strategies assist with outreach as well as improved coordination. Central Access made available through the HUB offers another coordinated access point targeting the youth and young adult population.

Project Everlast staff are now participating on state planning teams focused on improving educational transitions for youth in foster care.

## GOAL: Enlist the help of foster parents and agencies in supporting youth in attaining educational goals.

*Accomplishments:* The Project Everlast Speakers Bureau is holding workshop conferences across the state with case managers to help with transition planning for youth aging out of foster care. The Speaker's Bureau continues to provide youth speakers to foster parent training upon request. The need-based fund being managed now at the HUB, and The Opportunity Passport™ being implemented by Community Action are two additional resources available to youth while still in foster care as well as alumni.

*Outcome Area:* Employment

## GOAL: Increase access to support and training needed for employment success.

*Accomplishments:* To ensure that youth have information about former addresses, employment documents, birth certificates and IDs, case workers now have binders that can be built in partnership with the youth so that they have all the documentation needed upon leaving foster care. All DHHS caseworkers are being trained on this tool. DHHS took the lead on developing this tool with input from youth and partnering agencies.

## GOAL: Engage employers and service providers in supporting youth in building job skills and reaching employment goals.

*Accomplishments:* The Project Everlast staff has met with the Mental Health Association to discuss the HOPE program which is focused on supported employment for persons with serious mental illness. Through this meeting ongoing connections were established for future training and involvement in the employment/education team. This information is now included on the Project Everlast website.

### **GOAL: Ensure youth build relevant skills.**

*Accomplishments:* In order to ensure that all youth who are aging out have a family support worker/PALS worker/tracker worker, meetings are occurring monthly with the Transition Team that is comprised of leadership from key service providers, the HUB, CEDARS, DHHS, Centerpointe, PALS, Community Action Agencies and Region V. Through discussions at these meetings a visual referral diagram for service referrals for youth ages 14-24 has been created. A common referral form for young adults seeking services has also been created and is utilized by all agencies and directed to the HUB, the central access point for youth 14-24. In addition, the Project Everlast website provides great links to employment resources focusing on job searches, application and interview training and resume-building assistance. This website is being utilized to educate members of the Transition Team as well as other professionals in the community working with young adults.

### **GOAL: Connect pool of entry-level jobs to young people needing employment.**

*Accomplishments:* On May 7, 2014, a youth-centered career fair was held that was organized by the COC Youth Team.

### **GOAL: Increase reliable transportation.**

*Accomplishments:* This will take additional commitment from the community. For individuals of all ages without transportation, it can be difficult to gain access to employment and other necessary services. What we learned in the past few months about accessing transportation is found on the Project Everlast website, "Link-Transportation." Youth having the ability to purchase vehicles through The Opportunity Passport™ is one step toward purchase of a reliable vehicle. The need-based fund offers another opportunity to support youth for emergency repairs that may occur.

*Outcome Areas:* Health, Mental Health and Dental

### **GOAL: Engage the community and providers to improve access to health, mental health and dental services for young people.**

*Accomplishments:* A Health subcommittee was formed but was not well attended. After several meetings, it was decided to merge the members of this health subcommittee with the transition team and instead cover issues of health, mental health and dental care within this transition team. Sexual and reproductive health resources has been one meeting's panel discussion, the next meeting includes discussion from Region 5 alcohol and drug prevention efforts, additional information specific to sexual and reproductive health, and information about access to care at "Clinic with a Heart." Project Everlast's website has helpful links and contacts for helping youth establish a medical home including accessing medical insurance through the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid if eligible. Assistance with navigating the health care system is also readily available in Lincoln with links found on the website.

### **GOAL: Increase awareness and provide education surrounding health, mental health and dental needs and resources.**

*Accomplishments:* See the above description of progress made in this area.

**GOAL: Provide Health Advocates to support youth in identifying health care needs and navigating health systems.**

*Accomplishments:* The central access navigators at the HUB are assisting in filling this role in young adults' lives along with foster parents, caregivers, and transition workers and other community partners.

**GOAL: Remove stigma and confidentiality barriers to accessing health care, including sexual health and mental health.**

*Accomplishments:* In May 2014, a presentation was given to the Health Team on Lincoln's Title 10 Health Centers. These centers provide high quality and cost-effective family planning and related preventative health services for low-income women and men. Over the past year, youth and community partners have been participating in a system of care planning effort funded through a federal SAMHSA grant to DHHS. This plan was just submitted for federal review and it is anticipated that a subsequent RFA for implementation funds will be released in upcoming months. This plan focused on mental health services for children and families and contained a social marketing goal related to addressing public education and reducing stigma. Youth were included on all planning teams, feedback was gathered through survey and analysis provided by the UNL Public Policy Center. Nebraska Children orchestrated statewide youth focus groups in partnership with youth serving organizations and councils at two critical points during the 12-month planning period to assure youth voice in the planning process.

**GOAL: Remove transportation barriers.**

*Accomplishments:* Project Everlast has bus passes available to youth. PALS staff and other transition workers assist with this barrier also. In addition, the Project Everlast website provides links to resources for transportation. The Opportunity Passport™ provides a great matched savings plan for young adults who wish to purchase a car and the need-based fund can assist with minor car repairs.

**GOAL: Provide access to needed medications, prescription and over the counter.**

*Accomplishments:* Over the past year, greater awareness and emphasis has been placed on helping youth establish a medical home, obtain insurance or qualify for additional supports and services through age 21 via the Bridge to Independence program. Additionally, Lincoln's health community has been actively working to address needs for the uninsured and underinsured. Health 360 has been a valued resource in improving access to physicians, specialists and essential medications. Staff will also assist a consumer in completing needed paperwork to qualify for medication assistance. Yet gaps remain when it comes to acquiring medications without the funds or the necessary insurance coverage to obtain them.