



National Angels

Process Evaluation

Final Report
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The University of Texas at Austin
**Texas Institute for
Child & Family Wellbeing**
Steve Hicks School of Social Work



National Angels Process Evaluation Final Report

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Executive Summary

National Angels has contracted with the Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing (TXICFW) to conduct a process evaluation of the Love Box and Dare to Dream programs at the Austin, Texas chapter. This process evaluation is aimed at understanding how each program works, identifying program strengths and obstacles, and determining whether any program components may need to be adjusted. Results from the process evaluation will be used to inform the research design and activities of the outcome evaluation.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

TXICFW conducted a literature review of stability and wellbeing of children, youth, and families experiencing foster care, developed logic models for the Love Box and Dare to Dream programs based on program activities and intended outcomes, and conducted interviews with program participants. A total of 31 people participated in this study from June 16–August 30, 2021, including 8 National Angels staff, 10 volunteers, 10 caregivers, and 3 former foster youth involved in National Angels programming in the Austin, Texas chapter. All interviews were conducted in English and participants were asked to complete a short pre-interview form that collected basic demographic information. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed for major themes.

KEY FINDINGS

- National Angels services and programming are meeting immediate basic needs and providing long-term support for youth and families that they are not receiving from other social services.
- Connecting caregivers with volunteers has provided much-needed tangible and emotional support that has decreased caregiver stress and improved caregiver retention.
- The participation of unpaid volunteers helps signal genuine connection and authenticity to caregivers and youth, who feel more open and trusting of the relationship.
- National Angels sets clear expectations of volunteers to show up consistently for families, have patience in relationship building, and maintain relationships beyond one year. These expectations have been successful in establishing lasting relationships between volunteers and families.
- The Love Box and Dare to Dream programs create opportunities for youth to participate in normalcy activities that develop bonds and secure relational permanence between youth and volunteers.
- Children and youth exhibit improved confidence, behavior, and relationships with others during their participation in the Love Box and Dare to Dream programs as a result of the support received and relationships established through National

Angels services and programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from this process evaluation, the TXICFW research team offers the following recommendations for National Angels Love Box and Dare to Dream programs.

- 1.** Improve Training and Onboarding of Volunteers
- 2.** Create Space for Volunteers to Collaborate and Connect
- 3.** Recruit More Diverse Volunteers
- 4.** Improve Transparency of the Matching Process to Caregivers
- 5.** Additional Guidance and Age-Appropriate Activities for All Ages
- 6.** Increase Connection with Birth Families

LOOKING FORWARD

These initial findings strongly suggest that the National Angels programming and services help build a community of support and create positive impacts on children and youth experiencing foster care and their families. In combination with the theoretical framework explored through the literature review, TXICFW will use these findings to collaborate with the National Angels staff in refining the Love Box and Dare to Dream logic models and to develop an evaluation plan to conduct an outcome evaluation. The outcome evaluation will assess and measure specific and direct impacts that National Angels has on children, youth, and families.



Project Overview

National Angels has contracted with the Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing (TXICFW) to conduct a program evaluation of the Love Box and Dare to Dream programs at the Austin, Texas chapter. The program evaluation involves two phases: 1) process evaluation and 2) outcome evaluation. The process evaluation was conducted in 2021 to understand how each program works, identify program strengths and obstacles, and determine whether any program components may need to be adjusted. Results from the process evaluation are presented in this report and will be used to inform any refinement of the program logic models and the outcome evaluation.

ABOUT NATIONAL ANGELS

National Angels is a nonprofit organization that focuses on supporting children and families involved with Child Protective Services (CPS) through their Love Box and Dare to Dream programs. The primary goal of National Angels is to support caregivers, children, and youth through intentional giving, relationship building, and mentorship in order to maintain placement stability and caregiver continuity. For both programs, National Angels utilizes a broad network of volunteers who are matched with foster families and youth to establish support with guidance from National Angels staff and case managers.

LOVE BOX PROGRAM

The Love Box program provides foster families with connections and support not traditionally provided through the child welfare system. The program matches volunteers with a foster

family based on location, compatibility, and scope of needs. Volunteers work to build relationships with the whole family by spending quality time with them and creating personal care packages based on their current basic needs. When volunteers engage with the family deliver a monthly care package or "love box," this provides regular opportunities to connect and build relationships with the foster family. The Love Box Program provides important goods and services to foster families that are otherwise absent from traditional supports offered through child welfare. The items included in the Love Box vary widely and may include material items (e.g., clothes, shoes), household items (e.g., paper towels, laundry detergent), school supplies, or toys. Love Boxes can even be a commitment to activities such as extracurriculars (e.g., sports, playground), going on outings (e.g., eating at a restaurant, going to the movies) or providing babysitting for the family. The goal of the Love Box program is to establish lasting support for the foster family by developing a long-term relationship between the volunteer(s) and foster family. The identification of the foster family's needs and the development and delivery of a personalized Love Box is an important avenue in building trust and establishing a relationship between the foster family and volunteers.

LOVE BOX PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Below is a high-level description of how volunteers are on-boarded and participate in the Love Box Program.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

National Angels staff recruit volunteers

through various avenues, such as faith-based organizations, community events, social media, radio/podcasts, and referrals through collaborations with child placing agencies.

ONBOARDING VOLUNTEERS

After completing an online application and undergoing an initial intake call, volunteers participate in an onboarding training led by National Angels staff.

VOLUNTEER MATCHING

National Angels staff match volunteers with a compatible foster family in their area and to work together and facilitate introductions.

ASSESSMENT

National Angels staff facilitate introductions between volunteers and the foster family. National Angels staff and matched volunteers conduct an assessment of the family and youth to identify needs and areas of support.

LOVE BOX HANGOUT

Volunteers work directly with families to deliver the Love Box goods and services on a regular basis. Typically, this occurs once a month.

NEEDS MONITORING

Volunteers and National Angels staff routinely monitor the needs of the family and make modifications to the goods and services provided through the Love Box program to meet any changes requested by the family.

CONTINUITY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

The Love Box program follows specific youth and will work with new caregivers or birth families should the youth experience a placement change or return to their birth family. Ongoing participation in these

programs is up to the discretion of the new caregiver.

DARE TO DREAM PROGRAM

The Dare to Dream program matches volunteers with youth ages 11–22 years old in foster care or who have aged-out of foster care. This program helps volunteers and youth build a relationship and work towards a more successful future through youth-driven goal setting and mentorship. The program guides volunteers through 10 milestones that vary depending on the age of their paired youth, with the Dare to Dream Junior program offering tailored milestones to meet the developmental needs of younger youth.

10 MILESTONES OF THE DARE TO DREAM PROGRAM

1. Building Rapport
2. Personal/Professional Goals
3. Support Systems/Healthy Relationships
4. Physical Fitness/Meal Prep
5. Driver's License/Transportation
6. Sexual Education/Internet Safety
7. Interview/Resume Skills
8. Money Management/Budget Planning
9. College/Trade School/Military
10. Living Arrangements
11. Additional Areas of Focus: Community Engagement, Mindfulness and Self-Regulation, and Self-Esteem

10 MILESTONES OF THE DARE TO DREAM JUNIOR PROGRAM

1. Building Rapport
2. Bucket List and Goals
3. Healthy Relationships

4. Healthy Habits
5. Mindfulness and Self-Regulation
6. Community Engagement
7. Safe Choices and Personal Boundaries
8. Money Guidance
9. Career and Academic Exploration
10. Self-Esteem

DARE TO DREAM PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Below is a high-level description of how volunteers are onboarded and participate in the Dare to Dream Program.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

National Angels staff recruit volunteers through various avenues, such as faith-based organizations, community events, social media, radio/podcasts, and referrals through collaborations with child placing agencies.

ONBOARDING VOLUNTEERS

After paying a processing fee of \$50 volunteers participate in an initial intake call and an onboarding training led by National Angels staff.

VOLUNTEER MATCHING

National Angels staff match volunteers with youth and facilitate introductions. Depending on the family's preferences, volunteers will either meet with caregivers before engaging with the youth or participate in a group meeting with National Angels staff, the caregiver, and the youth. For youth who have aged-out of foster care, volunteers and youth meet on a one-on-one basis.

GOAL SETTING

National Angels staff and matched volunteers

conduct a youth-driven needs assessment of youth to identify needs and wants.

REGULAR ACTIVITIES

Volunteers schedule activities with the youth on a regular basis, typically at least twice per month.

CHECK-INS AND SUPPORT NEEDS MONITORING

The volunteer and staff routinely check in about how the relationship is going and if there are any areas of support or concerns that staff can help work through.

CONTINUITY FOR YOUTH

The Dare to Dream Program follows youth in care and will work with new caregivers or birth families should the youth experience a placement change or return to their birth family.

ABOUT THE TEXAS INSTITUTE FOR CHILD & FAMILY WELLBEING

The Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing (TXICFW) is a social work research institute within the Steve Hicks School of Social Work at The University of Texas at Austin. For over 10 years, TXICFW has used its research and training expertise to engage in a joint learning process with practitioners and agencies to build the foundational knowledge that best serves children and families.

TXICFW's research focuses on improving outcomes for children and families in many areas, including child welfare, foster care, adolescent sexual health, , and immigration. TXICFW researchers have direct practice experience working with families in crisis and utilize this real-world experience to guide their

research, evaluation, programming, and support services.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

TXICFW conducted the following research activities for this evaluation of National Angels' Love Box and Dare to Dream programs. A brief description of each research activity is provided below.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers gathered, organized, and analyzed existing evidence-based and published research on foster youth wellbeing indicators relevant to National Angels programming. This literature review focused on placement stability, relational permanence, normalcy, and resilience among youth experiencing foster care and the challenges and positive impacts these factors have on youth.

LOGIC MODEL

TXICFW researchers used existing program materials and information gathered during the literature review to develop logic models for the Love Box program and Dare to Dream program.

PROCESS EVALUATION

TXICFW conducted interviews with National Angels staff, volunteers, caregivers, and youth who were currently participating or who had participated in the Love Box program or Dare to Dream program at National Angels' Austin, Texas chapter. Researchers then transcribed and coded the interviews and conducted a thematic analysis. The design, methods, analysis, and findings are included in the last section of this report.



Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of foster care is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children in unsafe living situations (e.g., child neglect or maltreatment) by placing the child in an alternative living situation with another caregiver or placement (e.g., group home/residential home) until another form of legal physical permanency is achieved. Other forms of legal permanency may include:

- Reunification with their biological family
- Adoption or legal guardianship by their kinship or foster caregiver
- Aging out foster care at 18 years old

In 2019, most children exiting foster care achieved legal permanency through reunification, adoption, or guardianship, while 8% were emancipated from foster care (Children’s Bureau, 2019). However, there are struggles with achieving legal permanence for older children. Among children who enter foster care at 12 years old or older, 85% emancipate from foster care (Children’s

Bureau, 2019). These trends hold similar in Texas. Of the 5,281 adoptions that took place statewide in FY2020, only 9.6% of these were youth over the age of 13 (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, 2020).

DISPARITIES IN FOSTER CARE

Over the years, research has revealed major disparities within foster care. Older youth are less likely to be placed in kinship care compared to younger youth, and 25% of adoptions among older youth fall through before being finalized (Jedwab et al., 2020;

Barth et al., 2001; Child Information Gateway, 2012; Coakley & Berrick, 2008; Festinger, 2014). Studies have also shown that Black and American Indian/Alaskan Native children are nationally overrepresented in foster care and Hispanic children are disproportionately represented in some states (Children’s Bureau, 2016; Derezotes et al., 2005; Putnam-Hornstein, et al., 2013; Watt & Kim, 2019). Additionally, children of color have far worse experiences during foster care compared to white children, such as greater likelihood of receiving out of home placements, increased placement disruptions, fewer support services for their foster parents, less mental health or substance use disorder treatments, fewer caseworker visits, and longer time in foster care (Courtney & Wong, 1996; Foster et al., 2011; Harris & Courtney, 2003).

The foster care system in the United States has a long history of failing to center the best interests of children and their families, and many of its policies and practices are rooted in institutional racism. Several decades of research have consistently shown that children who experience foster care have more negative health and social outcomes compared to children who experienced similar abuses or neglect but were not in the foster care system (Hobbs et al., 2021; Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Siegel et al., 2016). Furthermore, various studies highlight how the foster care system can exacerbate the abuse and neglect of children, with some youth experiencing maltreatment while in foster care (Euser et al., 2014; Fluke et al., 2008; Font, 2015; Landers et al., 2021).

There are many protective factors that can counteract the negative outcomes associated with foster care and create positive

experiences for youth. Placement stability, relational permanence, normalcy, and resilience are critical variables that are strong determinants of the overall wellbeing of children and youth in foster care. The remainder of this literature review focuses on these four areas, each of which are central to the National Angels programming.

PLACEMENT STABILITY

Placement stability refers to foster care or kinship placements that are maintained for the duration of the intended stay. Maintaining this stability with consistent caregivers helps children establish secure attachment relationships with caregivers and decreases the likelihood of externalizing behaviors, delinquent behavior, and psychopathy (Rubin et al., 2007; Ryan & Testa, 2005; Humphreys et al., 2015; Konijn et al., 2019). Youth in stable living placements are more likely to have healthy brain development and positive academic outcomes, which contributes to positive child development (Vanderwert et al., 2016; Zima et al., 2000). Researchers clarify that the association of placement stability and positive outcomes are broad generalizations and not true for every case, as there are many factors that influence child development, behaviors, and long-term impacts. Not all youth in stable placements have positive outcomes and conversely not all youth in unstable placements or who experience frequent placement changes experience negative outcomes. Resilience among youth has been shown to be an important characteristic that helps children cope with negative experiences (Lutman et al., 2009).

PLACEMENT CHANGES ASSOCIATED WITH NEGATIVE OUTCOMES

Placement changes result in the child being prematurely moved to a new placement and may occur for a variety of reasons, including

systemic factors (e.g., funding challenges, needing to move child with sibling), caregiver factors (e.g., foster family moves, emergency in foster family), safety factors (e.g., substandard care by foster family), youth factors (e.g., caregiver unable to manage youth's behavioral issues, youth runs away from placement; James, 2004; Leathers, 2006; Koh et al., 2014 as cited in Osborne et al., 2021; Konijn et al., 2018). These disruptions are a common occurrence, with between 20%–50% of youth moving placements prematurely (Farmer et al., 2005; Leathers et al. 2019; López López et al., 2011; Minty, 1999 as cited in Konijn et al., 2019).

Placement changes not only disrupt the stability of the home and relationships with caregivers, but may also interrupt important connections with trusted teachers and friends at school, and familiar communities (Fawley-King et al., 2017 cited in Osborne et al., 2021). Additionally, placement changes to a new community can disrupt necessary support services such as counseling and therapies for youth (Pecora et al., 2018). Losing access to therapists and mental health professionals can become a compounded issue which spirals into further instability. Youth who experience more placement changes have exacerbated behavior problems, and each placement change increases the risk of a subsequent placement change (Newton et al., 2000; Webster et al., 2000 as cited in Font, 2015).

POSITIVE PLACEMENT CHANGES

While studies have shown that frequent placement changes negatively impact youth (e.g., poorer attachment and peer relationships, poor development and maintenance of emotional, behavioral, social, and educational outcomes), some placement changes help ensure children's safety and achieve their permanence goals (Gypen et al., 2017; Perry and Price, 2018; Vreeland et al., 2020). Moving from a more restrictive placement setting,

such as a residential treatment center, to a less restrictive and more family-like environment like a foster home, are types of placement changes that should be celebrated and encouraged. Other positive placement changes include placing a child with their sibling(s), transitioning a child from foster care to kinship care (with biological or fictive relatives), or moving a child from substandard placement to a safer living environment (Sattler et al., 2018).

Although federal performance reviews of child and family services consider the reasons behind placement changes, most research simplifies placement change as a binary variable—whether the placement change occurred or not—rather than examining the causes of the change (Children’s Bureau, 2017). Most of the research cited in this section examines placement disruptions in this binary way, (e.g., placement change or no placement change), unless explicitly clarified.

TIME IN CARE PREDICTS PLACEMENT CHANGES

Past research has examined the relationship between the length of a child’s stay in foster care and when placement changes occur. In looking at various administrative data sets, researchers found that most placement changes occur at the beginning of the placement, often within 2 to 6 months, suggesting these placement decisions did not successfully match youth with caregivers (Font, 2015; Wulczyn et al., 2003).

Researchers also found that youth who spent more time in foster care experienced a greater likelihood of placement changes (Wulczyn et al., 2003). One potential explanation is that older children have limited opportunities to exit via adoption. If permanency efforts fail, the child will ultimately stay in foster care until they emancipate. According to data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and

Reporting System, 56% of children adopted in fiscal year 2020 were age 5 or below. Those over the age of 13 only comprised 11% of all adoptions (Children’s Bureau, 2020).

PLACEMENT HISTORY INFLUENCES PLACEMENT STABILITY

Placement stability may be influenced by a child or youth’s placement history. Youth with a history of placement change are more likely to experience a subsequent placement change (Font, 2015). Additionally, certain types of prior placements have been associated with youth running away. Courtney & Zinn (2006) found that youth in congregate care settings more likely to run away from their placements than youth in foster family homes. As with placement changes, youth who have a history of running away are more likely to experience subsequent runaway instances. One explanation of this phenomenon involves the quality of relationships and experiences in congregate care settings. For example, children and youth may face increased difficulty connecting and forming meaningful relationships with rotating congregate care staff than with consistent caregivers in a family setting (Courtney & Zinn, 2006).

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PLACEMENT STABILITY AND IMPROVED OUTCOMES

KEEPING SIBLINGS TOGETHER IMPROVES OUTCOMES

Youth separated from their siblings are at increased risk of placement instability (Konijnen et al., 2019; Rock et al., 2015). Additionally, several studies have shown more positive outcomes for youth placed with their siblings. Kothari and colleagues found that for children who experience maltreatment and are placed in foster care, the sibling relationship had meaningful impacts on youths’ sense of connection, emotional support, and continuity

(Kothari et al., 2017). Richardson & Yates' (2014) findings suggest that there is a narrative coherence between siblings placed together and positive long-term impacts on youth's resilience in both education and occupation.

Sibling relationships generally serve as an important means of relational continuity (McHale et al., 2006 as cited in Waid, 2014). Many sibling relationships create a positive sense of connectedness and are a natural occurrence of relational permanence. In a study examining caseworker and foster parent reports in Illinois, siblings who were consistently placed together were found to improve their sense of integration into the home and experienced reduced risk of placement disruptions (Leathers, 2005). Among children with evidenced depressive symptoms, children who were not living with their siblings were more likely to experience placement instability (Barth et al., 2007).

KINSHIP PLACEMENTS ARE MORE STABLE THAN NON-RELATIVE FOSTER PLACEMENTS

Several studies have found that placements with a relative in kinship care were associated with greater placement stability than foster care placements (Chamberlain et al., 2006; Koh & Testa, 2008; Koh, 2010; Koh et al., 2014; Strijker et al., 2008; Usher et al., 1999; Webster et al., as cited in Font, 2015). Even among youth that experience multiple placements, researchers found that placements with kin were significantly associated with placement stability in the first 3 out-of-home placements (Osborne et al., 2021). Some research suggests that kin caregivers may feel more personally involved and a stronger sense of duty to care for the child because of their family status, thus resulting in greater placement stability (Rock et al., 2015).

Child welfare policies have also shifted towards promoting kin placements when youth

are removed from their home, with federal and Texas state law requiring prioritization of relative placements (42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(19);). Most research examines placement stability by controlling for factors to obtain a comparable group of kinship and non-relative foster youth, but Font (2015) suggests that selection bias exists in analyzing placement stability this way because placement decisions of youth to kinship over foster care are driven by policy goals and the child's specific situation. Youth in kinship placements are more likely to experience CPS involvement due to neglect and have fewer behavioral problems, higher cognitive abilities, and fewer disabilities and health problems (Font, 2014; Beeman et al., 2000; Grogan-Kaylor, 2000 as cited in Font, 2015). This research suggests a child's characteristics and background, rather than type of placement (kinship or non-relative), may influence placement stability, as there seems to be a tendency of certain characteristics of youth being placed with kinship compared to non-relative foster youth (Font, 2015).

CHILD AND CAREGIVER FACTORS INFLUENCE PLACEMENT STABILITY

A child's characteristics such as history of maltreatment, externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression, defiance), mental health concerns, and older age at initial placement have been associated with greater likelihood of placement disruptions (Oosterman et al., 2007; Konijin et al., 2019). Difficult child behaviors and mental health concerns can be challenging for caregivers to manage, particularly for a substitute caregiver who may be just beginning to forge a relationship and set boundaries with a child (Oosterman et al., 2007; Cooley et al., 2015; Whitt-Woosley et al., 2020). Child behaviors are commonly cited as reasons for placement changes (Oosterman et al., 2007).

O'Neill and colleagues (2012) found that

different factors were associated with placement stability based on developmental age. Their study analyzed a long-term foster care sample of the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being data and found that for children ages 6 to 10, caregiver's experience, caregiver's age, and child's externalizing behavior were associated with placement stability, while for early childhood (ages 1 to 5), caregiver characteristics such as race, household members, and caregiver experience were associated with placement stability (O'Neill et al., 2012). Several studies found significant associations between placement disruptions and child externalizing behaviors, older age of child at initial placement, length of time in foster care, history of unstable placements, and history of child experiencing maltreatment (Konijin et al., 2019, Oosterman et al., 2007). Although children's behavior may influence their overall placement stability, this does not imply that it is a child's fault if a placement is disrupted. Many factors, including trauma, have a significant impact on children's behaviors.

MANAGING CHILD BEHAVIORS AND CAREGIVER STRESS IMPROVES CAREGIVER RETENTION

For caregivers, one key factor that impacts placement stability is caregiver continuity. Stability can only be established if caregivers continue keeping their home open for children and youth. If foster parents choose to end their relationship with CPS, the child must move unless their foster parent adopts or otherwise receives full legal custody of the child. Caregivers may stop fostering because of increased stress, frustrations with the bureaucratic nature of the system, challenges with difficult behaviors from children and youth, poor support from others, and financial hardships (Randle et al., 2017; Whitt-Woosley et al., 2020). Several studies have examined the association between children's behaviors—

particularly externalizing behaviors—caregiver's challenges in parenting, and strained relationships between the child and substitute caregiver. A child's attachment to their substitute caregiver was shown to be beneficial to both the caregiver and youth. The strength of this caregiver-child relationship was predictive of the success of a placement, including fewer behavioral disruptions and greater placement stability (Leathers, 2006).

Research suggests that a child's disruptive behaviors can greatly influence the substitute caregiver's stress, satisfaction, and ability to maintain that placement (Harding et al., 2018; Rhodes et al., 2003; Sinclair & Wilson, 2003 as cited in Cooley et al., 2015). Even if the child's behaviors are manageable, the addition of a new child can contribute to foster caregivers feeling overwhelmed with new responsibilities and in-home dynamics (Lanigan & Burleson, 2017; Thompson et al., 2016 as cited in Mallette et al., 2020). One study found 20% of Australian foster and kinship caregivers scoring within the clinical range of high stress on the Parenting Stress Index (PSI-4-SF), with stress scores higher among caregivers caring for children with reported emotional and behavior problems (Harding et al., 2018).

CAREGIVER SUPPORT MAY IMPROVE CAREGIVER RETENTION

Mitigating caregiver stress is an avenue to improving caregiver satisfaction and preventing caregiver burnout. Researchers have found that a supportive team of professionals can help increase satisfaction and reduce stress and burnout among foster caregivers (Geiger et al., 2017; Greeno et al., 2016 as cited in Mallette et al., 2020). Additionally, supporting caregivers and mitigating stressors promotes family resilience, "a process by which family units are able to sustain, or even improve family functioning despite the presence of multiple risk factors" (Geiger et al., 2017 cited in

Mallette et al., 2020). Resilience among foster youth and foster families is a crucial factor that enables youth and families to overcome adversity. The persistence of healthy family functioning despite challenges suggests that resilience plays an important role in continuity of fostering among caregivers and placement stability (Geiger et al., 2016 as cited in Mallette et al., 2020).

TANGIBLE RESOURCES HELP WITH BASIC NEEDS

A study surveying 155 licensed foster caregivers found that tangible resources and support may mitigate challenges related to fostering when foster parents reported more disruptive child behaviors (Cooley et al., 2015). Cooley and colleagues were cautious to generalize these results due to the lack of other research examining the impact of child behaviors on the relationship between foster parent's tangible resources and foster parent's perceived challenges related to fostering. However, using an ecological perspective, researchers noted that a caregiver's greater access to tangible resources may alleviate other areas of stress that in turn gives caregivers more capacity to address child behaviors (Cooley et al., 2015). Researchers suggest that foster parents with more tangible resources (e.g., ability to pay for counseling sessions) may effectively address challenging child behaviors, thus decreasing fostering challenges and maintaining placements (Cooley et al., 2015). Interestingly, Cooley and colleagues (2015) found that among foster parents who reported fewer negative child behaviors, more tangible resources were associated with more challenges with fostering. Researchers propose several explanations for this finding, such as caregivers with fewer tangible supports may perceive fewer challenges with fostering because they are more tolerant of or have more expectations for disruptive child behaviors

among foster children (Cole & Eamon, 2007; Cooley et al., 2015). Another explanation was that foster parents with higher income levels reported "lower fulfillment with their role as a foster caregiver" (Cole & Eamon, 2007 as cited in Cooley et al., 2015). More research is needed to understand this relationship between tangible resources and its potential effects on foster parent perceptions of child behaviors.

FORMAL SUPPORTS POSITIVELY INFLUENCE PLACEMENT STABILITY

Formal supports, such as case management or foster parent training, are provided by the child welfare system or social support organizations and have been associated with higher retention and satisfaction of foster caregivers. Some formal supports include trainings for caregivers designed to improve placement success, enhance placement efficacy, reduce parenting stress, and enable familial relationships (Marcellus, 2010; Rodger et al., 2006; Fisher et al., 2006, Fisher et al., 2011 as cited in Mallette et al., 2020). Formal supports can also involve financial assistance, which may help preserve a family's ability to continue providing foster care services. Research suggests that caregivers who believe they have adequate financial support are less likely to stop fostering than caregivers who believe they lack financial support (Rhodes et al., 2001).

Formal supports also include social support from professionals such as CPS case managers, therapists, and staff at social service organizations. Cooley et al. (2015) found that foster parents who perceived fewer disruptive child behaviors were more likely to have a strong relationship between social support and more confidence and satisfaction as a foster caregiver. Researchers also observed that foster parents who perceived more disruptive child behaviors had a weaker relationship between social support and less confidence and satisfaction as a foster

caregiver (Cooley et al., 2015). This finding suggests that social support may positively influence a foster caregiver's perception of disruptive child behaviors (or ability to address disruptive behaviors) and give them more confidence and satisfaction about being a foster parent, which may increase placement stability (Cooley et al., 2015; Sinclair et al., 2005).

INFORMAL SUPPORTS POSITIVELY INFLUENCE PLACEMENT STABILITY

Informal supports also positively affect placement stability by offering unique relational support to foster caregivers. Research shows that foster families who have access to informal supports experience reduced stress and increased placement stability (Piel et al., 2016; Geiger et al., 2013). As informal supports take place outside of the professional-client relationship, power dynamics are more balanced and relationships tend to be more genuine.

Children and youth also benefit from informal supports. Non-parental adults can offer adolescents advice and resources, unlike peers, and can provide a safe space to discuss sensitive topics (e.g., relationships, drugs, or sexual activity) youth may not want to disclose to their caregivers (Beam et al., 2002 cited in Sterrett, 2011). Relationships with non-parental adults can provide validation and support for youth navigating adolescence. While these relationships may promote placement stability, the inverse is also true—placement instability due to frequent moves may undermine a child's ability to form consistent, supportive relationships with caring adults.

RELATIONAL PERMANENCE

RELATIONAL PERMANENCE IS AN EMERGING CONCEPT

In recent years, relational permanence for

youth has gained recognition in the child welfare community. Relational permanence differs from legal permanence because it is based on the developmental needs of children and youth who need long-lasting parent-like connections as they enter young adulthood (Brown et al., 2006). Relational permanence is defined as a sense of belonging and security with parental figures and other adults who can provide life-long guidance, emotional connection, and ongoing support. Typically, this provides youth with a safety net and someone who deeply understands them (Jones & LaLiberte, 2013). Relational permanence positively impacts a variety of outcomes for youth, such as social skills, mental health, self-esteem, and educational achievements (Jones & LaLiberte, 2013). Additionally, social support has been connected to overall resilience in adolescents (Shpiegel, 2016). However, youth in care do not always have the skills to build and nurture a relationship with an adult who might support them when they leave care (Nesmith & Christophersen, 2014; Denby et al., 2017).

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RELATIONAL AND LEGAL PERMANENCE

Legal permanence assumes that nurturing relationships will be secured through placement with a permanent caregiver. However, a change in legal status alone cannot provide children with the attachment that they need (Bamba & Haight, 2007). Though youth who age out of care may not have legal permanence, they can have relational permanence with adults who provide this sense of belonging and support as they transition to adulthood (Ball et al., 2021).

Children and youth whose parents' rights have been terminated can only exit foster care through kinship or adoption. Although adoption is a form of legal permanence, research suggests mixed results for relational

permanence through adoption for older youth. Many older youth who leave care seek out their biological families for support despite a history of abuse or neglect (Samuels & Pryce, 2008). In one study, many of these youth reported relational needs that were not met by reconnecting with their family (Samuels, 2009). Youth often seek out family members when aging out of care, indicating a benefit in helping youth find family members or other adults with whom they can build relational permanence. Many child welfare scholars are starting to emphasize that supportive and attached relationships are key to permanence, regardless of who these adults are or whether legal permanence has taken place. These relationships may exist between biological relatives but can often include unrelated adults who have built relational permanence with the youth.

FACTORS INFLUENCING RELATIONAL PERMANENCE

While relational permanence may exist naturally between children and their families, it can also be built for those who are not related to the child. According to Faulkner et al. (2018), relational permanence for foster youth is built through authentic relationships that promote genuine connection and lead to strong bonds. Authentic relationships incorporate honest communication about challenging topics, such as those about biological family members. Authentic relationships are also built through caring treatment, and families who treat youth with compassion and kindness are likely to establish stronger connections. Finally, there is a clear relationship between normalcy and relational permanence. Normalcy is an effective avenue to establishing bonds and relationships by advancing social development and overall wellbeing (Faulkner et al., 2018).

NORMALCY

WHAT IS NORMALCY?

In the context of child welfare, normalcy is treated interchangeably as an administrative, legal, and social concept. In the administrative and legal context, normalcy is defined as the policies and statutes which permit and promote a child's ability to participate in age-appropriate activities. These include extracurricular activities, in-school and out-of-school social activities, cultural and enrichment activities, and employment opportunities as listed in Texas Family Code Section 264.001 (State of Texas, 2021). As a social concept, normalcy encompasses a number of factors that are central to physical, emotional, and social wellbeing.

Normalcy is of particular importance to youth in care, since many are unable to participate in typical, age-appropriate activities due to CPS policies and heightened supervision. While these factors stem from a concern for safety, they can stymie critical everyday experiences for youth. Research has shown that the foster care experience tends to be socially isolating for youth, and many youth express frustrations with the inability to live a socially enriched life (Simmons-Horton, 2017; Faulkner et al., 2018; Ball et al., 2021).

Normalcy affects both the short- and long-term wellbeing of youth in foster care. In the short term, every-day experiences may have an immediate impact on youth behavior. In the long term, normalcy can have significant benefits in preserving health, establishing positive mental health, promoting social development, and building important relationships, including the relationships between foster children and their caregivers (Texas Supreme Court's Children's Commission, 2019).

NORMALCY INFLUENCES SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM HEALTH

Although insufficient research has been conducted on normalcy in the child welfare domain, research on normalcy among children more broadly can be used to infer impacts to youth in care. Research has shown positive impacts of normalcy on a child's long-term physical, mental, and social health. Children who participate in extracurricular physical activity have notable health improvements compared to children who do not partake in the same activities (Romero-Blanco et al., 2020). Youth in foster care also stand to benefit from increased physical activity, as children in foster care are more likely to be overweight or obese. Those who are placed in more restrictive settings that preclude normalcy, such as congregate care facilities, tend to be most at risk for obesity when controlling for all other variables (Scheiderman et al., 2013). Normalcy may also positively affect mental health and can benefit youth who have experienced trauma. Research shows that exercise and physical activity helps improve moods and aids in alleviating anxiety, stress, and depression (Mikkelsen et al., 2017). Similarly, a healthy social life and access to friends are associated with improved mental health (Blieszner, 2014).

NORMALCY IMPROVES SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Normalcy has clear positive implications for healthy social development. Extracurricular and social activities function as vehicles to building relationships, and the bonds forged through exposure to new experiences in these activities provides an opportunity to deepen relationships. Research validates this assertion, and strong evidence exists that extracurricular activities are largely responsible for new and continued friendships in adolescence (Schaefer et al., 2011).

When assessing trajectories in foster care, it

becomes clear that normalcy promotes healthy social development. Normalcy provides more opportunities for children and youth in foster care to form relationships, explore preferences, and acquire diverse experiences with people that contribute to who they are. It is possible that the inverse may also be true, as the absence of normalcy is marked by poor relationships with others, frustrations with the system, and risky behaviors. Research shows that the overall quality of relationships while in foster care strongly determines a youth's ability to form healthy relationships with others when they enter adulthood (Ball et al. 2021).

NORMALCY PROMOTES EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

Normalcy plays an important role in promoting educational success for youth in foster care through extracurricular school activities (White et al. 2017). Over the past few decades, several researchers have observed that extracurricular activities have a positive benefit on educational performance, with clear positive associations between participation in extracurricular activities and increase in academic performance (Gibbs et al., 2015; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Eccles & Barber, 1999).

The social relationships forged through participation in extracurricular activities could explain the positive association between these activities and academic performance. Ryabov (2011) found a positive correlation between friendships and grade point average; the more friends a student had, the higher their grades. The opposite was also true, as fewer friends were associated with lower grades (Ryabov, 2011). A more recent study showed that peer relationships in extracurricular activities greatly influence students' overall academic experience and performance (Fujiyama et al., 2021). Research also suggests that participation in extracurricular activities helps

generate resilience in avoiding common education problems, including grade retention, in- and out-of-school suspension, and behavior problems (Himelfarb et al., 2014). Given that many youth in foster care face challenges in education across several domains, such as poor performance, delinquency, and grade retention, the benefits associated with extracurricular activities may generate resilience in youth.

RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability to work through adversity and thrive despite challenging circumstances. Resilience is commonly thought to be an individual trait, but research also suggests that it is strongly determined by environment (Ungar, 2012). By conceptualizing resilience as a social factor in addition to being an individual trait, building social networks becomes imperative. Resilience functions as a mechanism to establish wellbeing across many domains. In mental health, research has shown that having an extended support network of relationships grants resilience by mitigating mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety (Collins et al., 2010; Salazar et al., 2011).

Research shows that all children who are removed from their home experience trauma. However, the degree to which they are affected by this trauma varies. Some foster youth may languish in care and ultimately have Rensburg (2018) found that adolescent peer supports are incredibly important and urge other professionals not to dismiss the significance of peer relationships in adolescence as these relationships build foundations for further resilience into adulthood (Theron & Rensburg, 2018).

poor outcomes, whereas other youth may thrive and excel in life. One possible explanation for this divergence is positive factors that promote resilience. Among the most important of these factors are the presence of strong, supportive, and nurturing relationships. In a study of youth in care who had completed or nearly completed a degree at a 4-year university, researchers discovered that supportive relationships as well as a history of involvement in community activities helped generate resilience (Hass & Graydon, 2009). Another study found similar results and credited overall placement stability as an additional factor that promoted resilience and educational success (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016)

Richardson and Yates (2014) found that sibling connections help promote resilience for youth as they emancipate from foster care. Those who were connected with their siblings were more adept at handling the challenges during their transition to independence (Richardson & Yates, 2014). While resilience granted between relatives may seem intuitive, the benefits granted by non-relatives can also be impactful. Further research on resilience among youth in care shows a clear association between positive relationships and resilience, and youth who have strong relationships with non-relative adults have improved wellbeing (Duke et al., 2017). Other research has found that peer relationships among adolescents may also promote resilience. Theron and

LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

The four major concepts examined in this literature review—placement stability, relational permanence, normalcy, and resilience—are wellbeing indicators that provide the greatest chances of success for

children and youth throughout their foster care journey. Placement stability is cultivated through safe, supportive, and nurturing environments by caregivers. Relational permanence is established through caring connections which feature authenticity, honesty, and compassion. Normalcy serves as a vehicle to these relationships and helps promote healthy social development through everyday activities and experiences. Resilience is a culmination of these factors and grants children and youth with the skills necessary to withstand challenges imposed by trauma histories. These factors contribute to overall success, and it is much more difficult to navigate through a crisis without them. Alternatively, deficiencies in these areas may be a source of hardship and strife for children and youth who endure the worst outcomes associated with foster care. It is imperative that child welfare practitioners understand the interconnectedness between these concepts to best promote success for children and youth after they leave foster care.



Logic Model

In collaboration with the National Angels team, TXICFW developed a logic model which reflects the core elements of the Love Box and Dare to Dream programs. Within these elements are several distinct categories: inputs, activities, outputs, and short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. The logic model serves as a conceptual map of the programs, as well as the ultimate goals anticipated in the outcome categories.

Figure 1: Love Box Program Logic Model

National Angels: Love Box Program Logic Model

Goal: Volunteers meet practical, everyday needs through intentional giving, in order to maintain placements and build relationships with children in foster care as well as their caregivers and siblings.

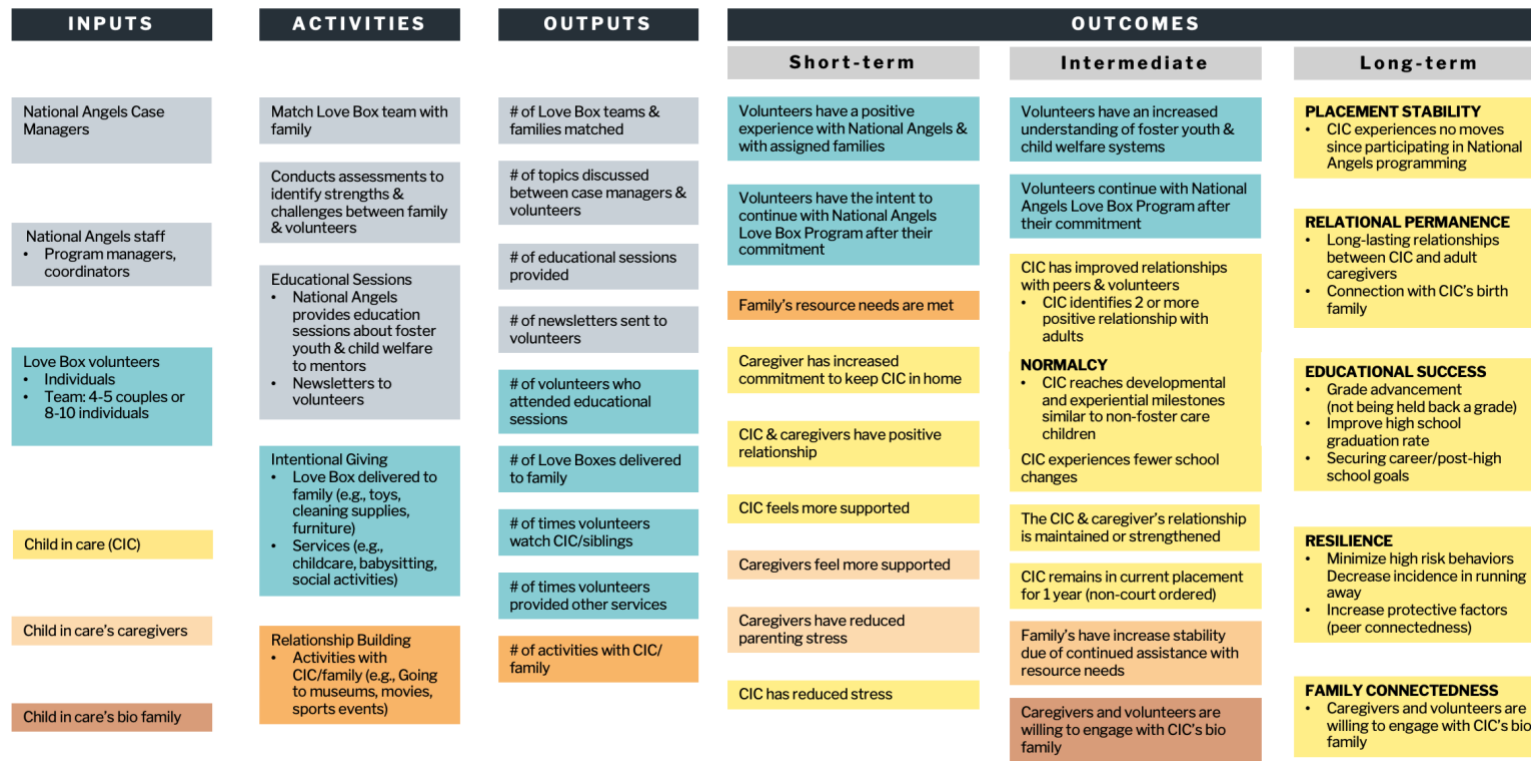
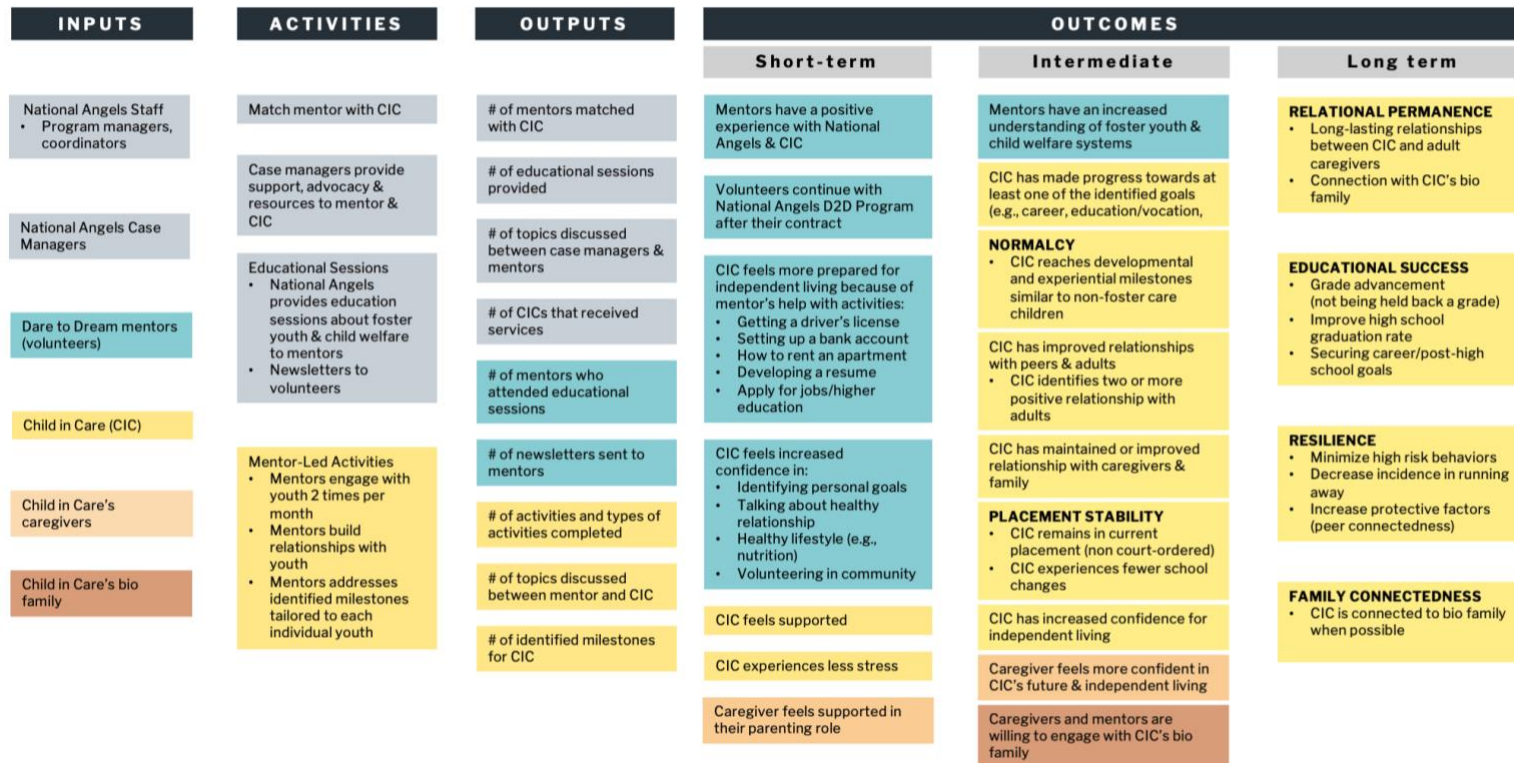


Figure 2: Dare to Dream Logic Model

National Angels: Dare to Dream Program Logic Model

Goal: Mentors build relationships with youth in foster care (child in care) to help guide them through developmental milestones in order to help reach adult preparedness.



Process Evaluation

This section describes the research activities, study sample, methods, and findings of the process evaluation of the National Angels Love Box and Dare to Dream programs.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This process evaluation is a qualitative study design of interviews with former and current participants of the Love Box and Dare to Dream programs. Participant groups included former foster youth, caregivers of foster youth, volunteers, and National Angels staff from the Austin, Texas chapter. In addition to interviews, all participants completed an online pre-interview with basic participant information (e.g., program participation type, length of time participating with program) and demographic information (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, education background).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Interviews were guided by the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of National Angels programming among staff, volunteers, caregivers, and former foster youth? What are the perceived strengths and areas for improvement within the program?
- What are the perceived impacts of the Love Box program and Dare to Dream program on families and children involved in foster care?
- What is the role of normalcy, relational permanence, resilience, and placement stability in the lives of youth in foster care and caregivers?
- How does National Angels support

normalcy, relational permanence, and placement stability in the families and children that they serve?

METHODS

Researchers collected qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with four types of participants in the National Angels' Love Box and Dare to Dream programs in Austin, Texas:

- Former foster youth (Dare to Dream)
- Caregivers of foster youth (Love Box and Dare to Dream)
- Volunteers (Love Box and Dare to Dream)
- National Angels staff (Austin, Texas chapter)

Each participant completed an electronic pre-interview demographic form. The demographic form and interview guides are located in Appendix A: Data Collection Tools. Only former foster youth and caregivers received a \$25 gift card for their participation in the study.

PARTICIPANT SAMPLE

A total of 31 interviewees participated in this study from June 16–August 30, 2021, including 8 National Angels staff, 10 volunteers, 10 caregivers, and 3 former foster youth involved in National Angels programming in the Austin, Texas chapter. The research team aimed to interview a diverse sample encompassing race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, caregiver type, and current and former affiliation with National Angels programming.

STUDY RECRUITMENT, SCHEDULING, INTERVIEWS, AND INCENTIVES

Researchers recruited participants through targeted outreach. National Angels identified prospective participants within each participant category, and the research team coordinated with a National Angels staff to share study information to a subset of those potential participants.

The steps below detail what participants experienced as part of the qualitative data collection process.

DISTRIBUTION OF STUDY INFORMATION

National Angels leadership identified staff, volunteers, caregivers, and former foster youth who were involved with programming at the Austin, Texas chapter. Researchers reviewed and selected a subsample of these potential participants that reflected as much diversity as possible. National Angels leadership then emailed potential participants using a script developed by researchers. This email provided information about the study and interview process.

SCHEDULING INTERVIEWS

Email scripts included the researcher's information, and a designated National Angels staff connected the eligible participant with the researcher. The participant provided their email and phone number and selected their interview preference, either by Zoom video or a phone call.

CONSENT AND PRE-INTERVIEW FORM

When a participant scheduled their interview, the research coordinator shared a Qualtrics link with the participant to complete the Consent and Pre-Interview Form. The Pre-Interview Form was a short online survey that collected basic demographic information about the participant (e.g., age, race/ethnicity), participation in National Angels programs, and household information (for caregivers and former foster youth only). A copy

of the pre-interview form is in Appendix A: Data Collection Tools.

CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

All interviews were conducted remotely through Zoom video calls or telephone calls. At the time of the interview, the researcher either joined the Zoom video call or called the participant by phone to conduct the interview. The researcher reviewed the consent form, answered any questions the participant had, and then used the designated interview guide to begin the interview. All participants were notified when recording started and ended. All interviews were semi-structured to allow the researcher to follow up with responses or themes expressed by the participant.

DISTRIBUTE INCENTIVE

Caregivers and former foster youth were eligible to receive a \$25 gift card. At the end of the interview, the researcher confirmed the participant's email in order for the \$25 gift card to be emailed to the participant. TXICFW uses Tango Card, an e-gift card service that allows the participant to select the type of gift card they would like to receive (e.g., Amazon, Visa, Target, etc.).

DATA ANALYSIS

Once interviews and focus groups were recorded, the audio recordings were transcribed using GMR Transcription, a third-party secure transcription service used by TXICFW. Researchers uploaded audio files to GMR Transcription, which transcribed the recordings verbatim, in either English or Spanish, in a Microsoft Word document.

The research team employed thematic analysis methods to analyze qualitative data by developing a coding scheme of major themes and applying codes to relevant statements in the transcripts. Coding was completed using Dedoose, a qualitative analysis secure cloud-based platform. Two TXICFW team members independently coded each transcript and then reviewed how

consistently codes were applied, testing for interrater reliability and resolving any differences between coders. All codes were further analyzed and reorganized in Microsoft Excel to capture themes in the data.



Findings

This section of the report will share findings from interviews and pre-interview data from National Angels staff, volunteers, caregivers, and former foster youth.

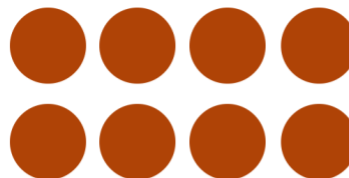
ABOUT PARTICIPANTS

Figure 3 describes the participant group and programs in which they were involved. Many participants were involved in both programs, and some were involved in the programs in different roles (e.g., National Angels staff were also Love Box volunteers and/or Dare to Dream mentors; Love Box recipients were Love Box volunteers and/or Dare to Dream mentors). The two caregivers who had a child in the Dare to Dream program were also participants in the Love Box program. Similarly, volunteers participated in both Love Box and Dare to Dream programs. A table of the demographics of each participant group is in Appendix B: Data Tables.

Figure 3: Participant snapshot

WE INTERVIEWED:

8 NATIONAL ANGELS STAFF:



10 VOLUNTEERS:



10 CAREGIVERS:



3 FORMER FOSTER YOUTH:



ABOUT NATIONAL ANGELS STAFF

Most staff interviewed were current National Angels employees, with half being executive staff. Executive staff are leadership roles that include supervision, financial operations, and executive director roles. Six staff were involved in implementing either the Love Box or Dare to Dream programs. A table of staff demographics can be found in [Table 1](#) in Appendix B.

Staff also had diverse professional experiences within the organization. Nearly all staff members had assumed various roles throughout their tenure with the organization. At the time of the interviews, many staff remarked that they had performed many duties in other roles. Staff suggested these experiences led to a more well-rounded approach to understanding the organization and its challenges and granted the ability to find solutions to drive the work forward. Many National Angels staff also reported previous experience as a Love Box and/or Dare to Dream volunteer.

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

Most National Angels staff participants had human services backgrounds and formal education in social work or a closely related field. One staff had a communications degree and another had an extensive finance background, which suited both of their current roles within the organization. National Angels staff joined the organization in diverse ways. Some staff were hired at the end of their internship with the organization, while others were recruited directly by the executive director. In addition, some staff sought employment with the organization when they learned about their mission and commitment to serving systems-involved families.

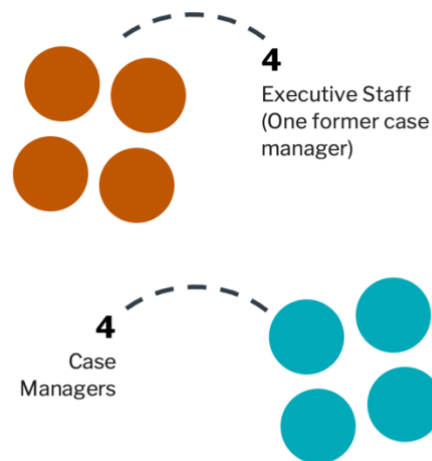
BACKGROUND IN CHILD WELFARE

Although National Angels staff generally had formal education in human services, most did not have a deep understanding of child welfare and foster care prior to joining the organization. Staff freely shared their limited experiences, their

previous biases and assumptions, and how they were able to familiarize themselves with relevant child welfare knowledge. Staff most commonly learned more about child welfare through ongoing professional support from colleagues, hands-on experience working with families, and continuing education through trainings, conferences, and learning opportunities.

Figure 3. Staff member snapshot

8 NATIONAL ANGELS STAFF INTERVIEWED:



The length of time a staff member had worked at National Angels ranged from **7 months** to **5 years**, with an average of **3.1 years**.



The length of time a staff member had worked in child welfare also ranged from **7 months** to **5 years**, with an average of **3.3 years**.

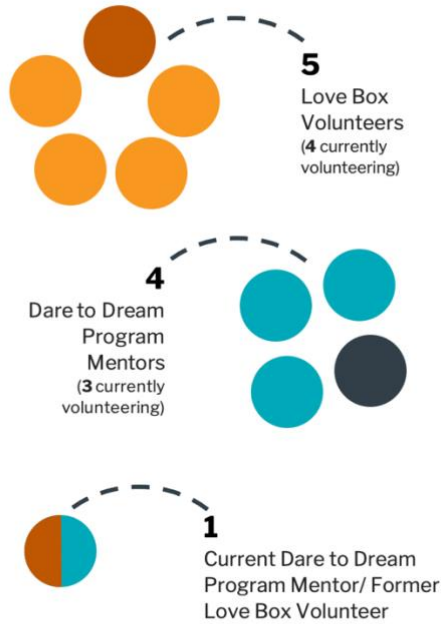


90% of staff said they had worked on both the Love Box and Dare to Dream programs.

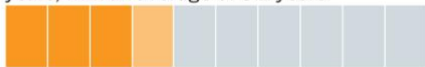


Figure 4. Volunteer snapshot

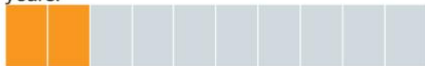
10 VOLUNTEERS INTERVIEWED:



The number of years a participant volunteered for the Love Box program ranged from **2** to **4** years, with an average of **3.2** years.



The number of years a participant mentored for the Dare to Dream program ranged from **9** months to **2** years, with an average of **1.5** years.



ABOUT VOLUNTEERS

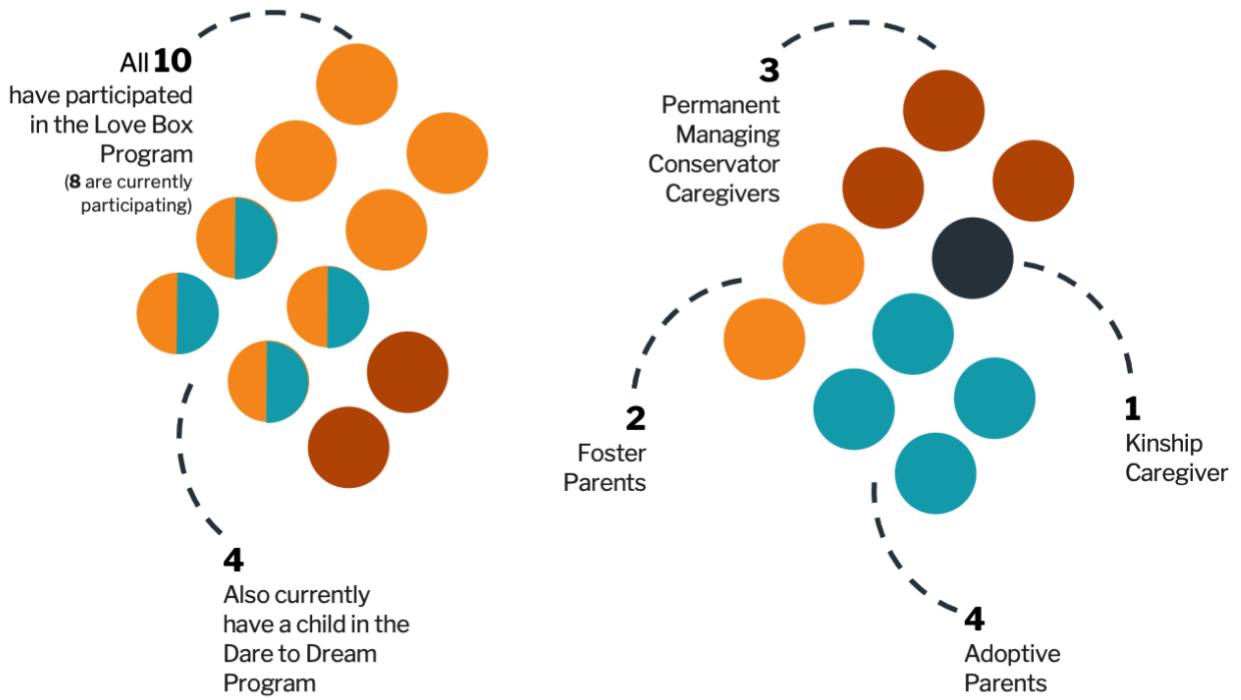
Volunteers were diverse in age, but most interviewed were female, white, and had full-time careers in a variety of sectors. Volunteers discussed having sparse child welfare knowledge, with some having no knowledge of child welfare prior to participating with National Angels and others studying child welfare in college or having a personal experience exposing them to the foster families. A table of volunteer demographics can be found in [Table 2](#) in Appendix B.

ABOUT CAREGIVERS

Caregivers were primarily female, but diverse in terms of age, race, income, and placement types. A table of caregiver demographics can be found in [Table 3](#) in Appendix B.

Figure 5. Caregiver Snapshot

10 CAREGIVERS INTERVIEWED:



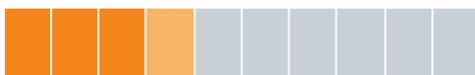
Time caring for youth ranged from **3** years to **8** years, with an average of **4.9** years



50% were single parents.



The length of time a family had participated in the Love Box program ranged from **1** to **4** years, with an average length of **2.3** years.



80% had more than 1 child at home.



Some caregiver interviewees (N = 5) had a family relationship or other relationship with the foster youth's biological parent(s). These caregivers described varying levels of relationships and interactions with the child's biological parents and family, often dependent on the caregiver's own relationship with the biological parent. Caregivers who were grandparents to youth mentioned some involvement with the biological parent, while others discussed negative experiences with the biological family or not knowing the biological parent. Among caregivers who had a relationship with the youth's biological parents, the motivation to care for youth was out of necessity. Some reported being unprepared to care for youth at the time of placement, with insufficient space for multiple kids, while others had capacity and housing to step in as the caregiver. Two caregivers described being licensed with a child placement agency (CPA). Multiple caregivers had adopted foster youth or were in the process of adopting youth, indicating a positive and stable placement.

Half of all caregiver interviewees described being a single parent, most worked full-time, and most had more than one child. In addition to household income, some caregivers described receiving other supports from social programs, with most (N = 6) receiving Medicaid for youth experiencing foster care. Two interviewees mentioned receiving COVID-related assistance. One caregiver received other types of social program supports (e.g., SNAP, WIC, unemployment benefits). Higher ratios of children to adult caregivers in a home, income, and social supports may impact capacity, caregiver stress, and ultimately placement stability.

INITIAL CONCERNS ABOUT CARING FOR FOSTER YOUTH

During interviews, caregivers were asked if they had any concerns about caring for youth experiencing foster care. Most caregivers (N = 9) described having some concerns or reservations about being able to care for youth. The top concern was inability to keep up with CPS

paperwork, appointments, and finding childcare for youth in case of an emergency. Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, one caregiver who was a single parent described feeling stuck and a lack of support to care for her child if she were to become sick with COVID-19.

"And they [CPS] were like, well, what if you got sick with COVID? What would you do? And honestly, I was like, I don't know. My mom's 75. I couldn't put a COVID person with my mom. So, I'm like, I don't have anybody. So, it's things like that that I'm like, maybe, I should just move on. Maybe, it's something for more married people where they have more support at home, and they just wanna help a couple kids out. But again, I think it's hard to find placements for teens. And so, I think that they need more places, but you would think they'd make it a little easier."

— Caregiver

Older caregivers expressed concern about being able to care for a younger child, especially as a single adult caregiver. Some caregivers also expressed worries about financially supporting the youth. Given the dynamic with the child's biological parents, a few caregivers who were related to youth expressed concerns about the safety and stability of the youth in care and did not want the child to go back under care with CPS.

RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

Six caregivers described a very close relationship with youth in their care and noted that youth had a close relationship with other siblings in their home. Several caregivers said youth called the caregivers "mom and dad" as testament to how the children viewed their relationship. One caregiver also described wanting to adopt the youth she was caring for, illustrating the strong bond between the youth and caregiver.

Three caregivers discussed initial difficulty in their relationship with youth and improvements through time and effort put into the relationship. Caregivers all attributed these difficulties in the child's behavior and relationship with them as result of disruption in placement stability, confusion and anger about CPS intervention, and trauma. One caregiver reflected on the immense challenges in her relationship and improvements with the help and support of National Angels.

"We went through a lot of struggle; I almost gave up. But I thank God for everybody that worked around me and with me. Through the foster care and up to the [National] Angels, everybody. They did an awesome – they supported me a lot. And so, I hanged in there, and now I can say that we've overcome. Our relationship is growing, let's put it like that. We're not – we haven't arrived, but it's there, and the worst is over, I think. And so now it's just – my focus is just on building, now, a family through this, for three."

— Caregiver

PLACEMENT CHANGES AMONG YOUTH

Some caregivers (N = 5) noted that youth in their care had experienced multiple placement changes prior to being placed with them. One caregiver reported that the youth in their care moved several times between biological parents and their home, with other foster placements in between. Another caregiver said their grandchild had frequent placement changes that included a therapeutic foster home due to outbursts and behavioral issues.

CONNECTION WITH YOUTH'S BIOLOGICAL FAMILY

While some caregivers (N = 5) had a connection or rules at facilities such as no cell phones or internet posing major challenges to having positive

family relationship with the child's biological family (e.g., godparent, aunt, or grandparent), only one caregiver reported the biological father had a relationship and bond with their child. Caregivers who had no prior relationship with the child's biological family did not describe any connection with the biological parents, nor did the child have any relationship with them. Overall, most caregivers who participated in interviews did not discuss the child having contact with their biological parents, and foster caregivers did not prioritize connecting youth with their biological parents. There are several possible explanations for this: first, caregivers who adopted their children may have had a "closed adoption" by which connections with biological parents are precluded as part of the terms of the arrangement; second, caregivers may be a relative of the biological parents and choose not to engage with the parents due to ongoing tensions; lastly, the caregiver may be a foster parent whose child placement agency has a cultural practice of discouraging biological parent engagement to avoid potential stressors to the foster caregiver. If programming is aimed at improving youth's connections to their birth families, National Angels should consider program improvements in building relationships and intentional connection with biological families. Currently, the logic model describes improving family connectedness of youth with their birth families, which is challenging to improve if there is a lack of contact with youth's birth parents.

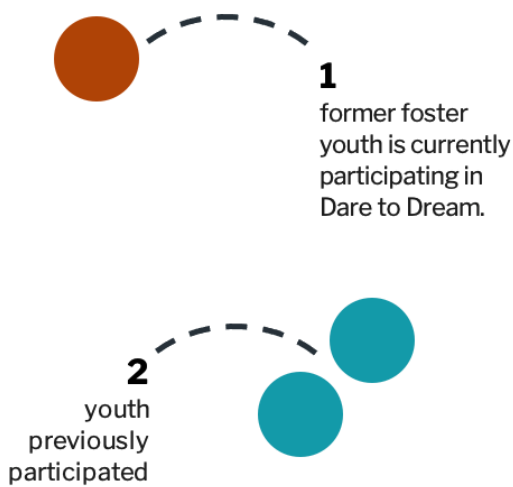
ABOUT FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

All three former foster youth reported spending at least part of their foster care experience living in a facility, such as a group home or residential treatment center. One interviewee had exited foster care and two were in extended foster care, participating in the Supervised Independent Living (SIL) program. All former foster youth described negative experiences during their time in foster care, with the lack of normalcy, freedom, and strict relationships and experiences. At the time of the interview, each former foster youth was in a

different period of their post-foster care life, with some still transitioning into adulthood and working to achieving financial and career stability. A table of youth demographics can be found in [Table 4](#) in Appendix B.

Figure 6. Foster youth snapshot

3 FORMER FOSTER YOUTH INTERVIEWED:



The length of time youth participated in Dare to Dream ranged from **1 to 4 years**.



The amount of time youth had been in foster care ranged from **5 to 9 years**.



MOTIVATION TO BE PART OF NATIONAL ANGELS

MOTIVATION TO WORK AT NATIONAL ANGELS

When staff were asked about their primary motivations for joining National Angels, they unanimously shared a sense of vocation to improve their community or wanting to serve others. Staff consistently discussed their desire to help others in need and their belief that National Angels provided a path to achieve these goals. Though it was not specifically asked, some staff volunteered information about their own lived experience in foster care and cited that as a primary motivator for joining National Angels. Staff also reflected on internal support as a motivator for working at National Angels. They reported a strong sense of camaraderie between colleagues and felt that they could rely on each other for support, celebrate accomplishments as a group, and work through challenges as an organization.

VOLUNTEERS' MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE IN PROGRAMMING

Among volunteers, motivations to participate in National Angels programming varied. Some volunteered to work through their own personal trauma, some wanted to eventually foster or adopt, and some were empty nesters looking to serve others after raising their own children. Volunteers often described feeling motivated to work with National Angels after hearing directly from National Angels staff discussing the program, whether through an in-person presentation, personal connection with staff, social media video, or podcast interview with staff. Volunteers found that the opportunities offered through the Love Box and Dare to Dream programs allowed them to put their time towards a worthwhile effort in an effective manner.

“I would just say so many people search forever to find their purpose or to be fulfilled. And typically, when it comes to purpose and fulfillment, you have to involve other people. And it’s about your own impact. And this program, if there’s people out there trying to figure out how they can feel fulfilled, that they’re making a difference in this world, that they’re having an impact, that they have a purpose, I mean, this program, you see it every single day directly. And I recommend it highly for anybody that thinks or considers donating some time consistently to have a lifelong impact on someone else, to do it.”

– Volunteer

CAREGIVERS’ MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE IN PROGRAMMING

Caregivers were motivated to participate with National Angels after hearing about the additional resources and support that the program could offer to them and their foster youth. Many caregivers discussed the strong personal bonds they had with National Angels staff, describing how staff would respond quickly with resources, check-ins, and phone calls to support families.

“In the beginning of parenting, I was very grateful, and I was – it was really hard for me to ask for help. And then once the kids got to us, and I saw how much work it is to take care of kids, especially kids who come from trauma, I put my pride aside and I started reaching out for any resources or help that were offered. [My] previous case manager connected us with [National Angels].”

– Caregiver

YOUTH’S MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DARE TO DREAM PROGRAM

Youth were introduced to National Angels in various ways. One interviewee described how her sister who was also in foster care had a positive experience with National Angels and encouraged her to reach out for support through the program. The other two interviewees were introduced to National Angels by their caseworkers. All three interviewees were motivated to engage with National Angels to gain support. One interviewee who was out of foster care at that time was in need of support because she was pregnant, homeless, and had tense relationships with family members. Another who was in SIL described being unprepared for independent living, feeling isolated, and needing emotional and tangible supports.

“It was when I was at a SIL. And – and I just need to like – I feel like I need[ed], more support in my life. Because I didn’t have anyone to talk to or anything like that.”

–Former Foster Youth

“And at the time, I was pregnant with my son, and I was going through a lot of, you know, things, kind of dealing with homelessness, having to stay in my family home and being threatened to be kicked out and just all these things. And she was like, hey, there’s this program that they help ex-foster youth, and I feel like you’d be a great fit. I see that you have this potential and just all these things.”

— Former Foster Youth

RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS, CAREGIVERS, AND YOUTH

The sections below present interviewees’ perspectives on the program implementation components of recruitment, onboarding, and program support.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

Volunteers were recruited in a variety of ways, including through personal connections with National Angels staff, in-person presentations at social service or community organizations, social media posts, podcasts, newsletters, and word of mouth. Volunteers had mixed background knowledge on foster care and child welfare, with most knowing little about these areas and only a few volunteers having personal connections with someone who was in foster care or caring for foster children. Although most were unfamiliar with the complexities of the foster care system, they were motivated to volunteer with National Angels to learn more about child welfare and help youth and families.

RECRUITMENT OF YOUTH AND CAREGIVERS

Many caregivers and youth were connected with National Angels through established collaborations and referral channels with child placing agencies (CPAs), foster care organizations in the community. National Angels staff, particularly case managers, have relationships with CPS or CPA case managers, who would then refer families and youth to Love Box or Dare to Dream programs. Some caregivers were connected through presentations by National Angels at a community event, which led to establishing a connection with a National Angels staff member.

RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES

One challenge reported by staff is having more families needing assistance than they can currently accommodate. Many foster families have unmet needs or lack social support, which leads them to seek out extra assistance. As National Angels continues to grow in both size and reputation, they are able to help more families and youth, but their volunteer-based model relies on recruiting more volunteers to assist with advancing their mission.

“We have such a long list that it would be just so amazing if we could match those people and get them supported. I feel like that’s the hardest part, just seeing how long people sometimes wait. There are people who need to wait more than a year to be matched.”

— National Angels Staff

EMPHASIS OF LONG-TERM COMMITMENT FROM VOLUNTEERS

Volunteer commitments are a regular topic of concern. Because the National Angels model is based on forming close and long-lasting relationships with families and youth, it is imperative that any volunteer who expresses interest in volunteering is truly committed to dedicating their time and following through with promises made. Staff have protocols in place to screen volunteers and assess their overall commitment but will sometimes have to turn potential volunteers away if they believe they are not committed to participate for at least a one-year period. Staff also do their best to inform the volunteers of the unique challenges that come with volunteering with systems-involved families and youth, which may overwhelm potential volunteers.

“And I think [the volunteers come] from a place of ‘I’m too embarrassed to tell you that I wanna quit’ or that ‘I have basically jumped in headfirst and signed up for too much that I can’t take on basically.’”

— National Angels Staff

ONBOARDING VOLUNTEERS

MANDATORY TRAINING COULD BE IMPROVED

Volunteers largely did not find much value in the onboarding process. Comments were made that the experience was cursory, too short, and not revisited after the first information session. Some described not feeling prepared after the training, and those that were prepared noted it was because of their education or background on trauma and child welfare rather than the training. Volunteers expressed a desire for more information, strategies on how to work through early challenges, and a network to connect with other volunteers.

“I think it would have been really cool to hear directly – or maybe even gotten paired up with – maybe for just one call, one phone call even with a mentor – like an experienced mentor in the program – just to get a boots on the ground like, ‘Here are some examples of some challenges we had to work through. This is how long it takes.’ I think that would have been really, really helpful in the front end just to hear from the people that have been doing it for a while.”

— Volunteer

“I think the actual onboarding and training didn’t really make me feel any more prepared.”

— Volunteer

While volunteers were eager to gain more information and training, staff and volunteers also mentioned specific topics during the training that were helpful in guiding their connection with youth and families. Some useful topics included youth development, information on trauma, and background information on foster care.

SETTING HEALTHY EXPECTATIONS ABOUT WORKING WITH FOSTER FAMILIES

National Angels staff work to set healthy expectations for staff and volunteers who wish to work for the organization or volunteer. Staff are keen to educate volunteers who otherwise might approach the work with a savior complex that they are here to support families and youth on their journey, not to decide what is best for them unilaterally.

“I think the challenge anyone faces in social work is just being careful that you’re not bringing your own perspective and solution to someone else’s story, that you’re a mirror when you need to be a mirror and microphone when you need to be a microphone, but you’re not the one self-determining what they need. That’s not really your place. It’s hard to do. You know, if you’re a fixer, you kind of wanna just take charge.”

— National Angels Staff

Several volunteers discussed that the training emphasized patience and consistency, particularly with foster youth. Volunteers were often reminded that relationships with foster youth will be slow to build and prompted volunteers to manage expectations at the beginning of meeting with their foster family.

VOLUNTEER CONTINUITY AND ADAPTING TO PLACEMENT CHANGES OR PERMANENCY STATUS

Given the potential for placement changes for children in foster care, National Angels has adapted several strategies to ensure continuity of relationships and services afforded through both the Love Box and Dare to Dream programs. If placement changes occur, staff will inform volunteers of the change and create a plan to try to ensure continuity. Careful consideration is given to the distance of the new move and the capacity of the caregiver to maintain continuity. For example, a 30-minute drive may be more likely to be maintained versus a 6-hour drive.

The National Angels model is to support the whole family; therefore, volunteer commitments do not immediately end if a child has a change in permanency status. Volunteers make efforts to follow children who are reunified with their families, adopted, or are moved to kinship settings. The child’s new caregiver may choose to allow for the relationship to continue or may opt out of the arrangement, but National Angels is instrumental in communicating the purpose of the organization and facilitating the volunteer’s introduction to the new family.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

This section describes key components of program implementation that include matching of volunteers with families, Love Box program activities, Dare to Dream program activities, and ongoing support from National Angels staff.

MATCHING VOLUNTEERS AND FAMILIES

The majority of interviewees reported that the matching process went well and considered the interests of all parties involved (youth, caregivers, volunteers) to develop the best match. Ultimately, the match is made by a National Angels staff and who then facilitates the initial meeting. One staff member noted that the match process could be improved, as it is an important foundation to establishing a successful relationship. One caregiver shared the same sentiment and felt that some volunteers were expecting

younger foster youth when her kids were all teenagers. Another was curious to learn more about the matching process, training, and the background of volunteers.

“They [volunteers] did come by here, and we talked. But I didn’t go into no details or ask about they background, what they background is, what they do. Eventually, I did get around to asking them, the ladies, eventually, you know...But I think it would’ve been nice for me to know up front, prior to them getting with my girls, to know a little bit more about the people, the mentors.”

— Caregiver

LOVE BOX PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Both caregivers and volunteers had very positive experiences in the Love Box program. Volunteers felt useful having the opportunity to directly help a family, and caregivers were extremely grateful for the additional support. Two caregivers described how they wanted to pay it forward and be a Love Box volunteer to another family, which reinforces how pivotal this experience was for them. Volunteers who had experiences being a Love Box volunteer for multiple families compared their experiences, particularly on different comfort levels, support needs, and time to build relationships. For most volunteers and caregivers, the Love Box program started out with a group meeting with the National Angels case manager to identify support needs and followed by monthly Love Box drop offs. After some time for the relationship to be built, volunteers and caregivers shared stories of volunteers spending leisure time with the foster families, being a source of reliable support for emergencies, watching kids, or attending school events. While some volunteers were grateful to help with financial support, most found more enjoyment through opportunities to bond with the family and take pressure off the caregiver by babysitting or attending an appointment with the youth.

“The Love Box program is a wonderful break for foster parents. It provides that fill-in-the-gaps support because foster parents frequently are budgeted very close to the bone and don’t have a lot of money for extras. And the Love Box program provides those financial niceties. Things like extra cleaning supplies or diapers or birthday presents or a cake [...] it provides that friendship for the parent and that support for the parent as well as financial support for the family. And it also provides a really great – a positive adult in the life of the foster kid. Somebody who’s there very consistently and isn’t paid to care about the kid, but just naturally does.”

— Volunteer

“I guess the extra support that we get. You know, foster care comes with its own challenges and, you know, sometimes just the frequency of children living in and out of homes can be challenging and so having somebody to be able to call if we really need something, our Love Box Family has been able to when we got a placement on short notice. A couple of months ago the kiddo came and he didn’t have any clothes, he didn’t have a pair of shoes that fit, and I had just been talking with her and mentioned it and before the end of the night suddenly there were bags of clothes on my doorstep which, you know, saved me a trip of trying to take, you know, five kids to Target which is huge. So that’s been pretty awesome having the extra support.”

— Caregiver

A few interviewees described some apprehension of caregivers communicating their needs to volunteers, citing that it took some time for caregivers to feel comfortable asking for help. Volunteers noted that they would consistently check in with caregivers to encourage them to identify areas where they need support. Because the program was so individualized, some volunteers struggled with finding fresh ideas for items or activities for families. A few staff also echoed this sentiment that guidance and ideas for Love Box volunteers could be improved.

DARE TO DREAM PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Interviewees also had positive experiences with and valued the Dare to Dream program, especially because of its focus on relationship building. While the program is guided by 10 milestones to aid in goal setting during the transition to adulthood and independence, National Angels staff clearly express that the primary goal is to build a relationship with youth. Caregivers and youth interviewed felt that all the volunteers were a good fit. Some volunteers described challenges in building a relationship with youth but were prepared to be patient and consistently show up for the youth to feel comfortable. Volunteers had mixed feedback on the 10 milestones—some felt that the milestones were helpful, while others felt that they were not age-appropriate for younger youth. Overall, volunteers appreciated the flexibility and focus on building an organic relationship with youth.

“I really like [that] they put a lot of trust and freedom in the mentor to really lead the relationship the way you think it should be going. They give you a handbook that has different milestones, which are really good to center on. But something [my National Angels case manager] was very specific on at the beginning of this was like, ‘Really let your mentee guide you into the conversations they feel comfortable having.’ So, I’ve never felt pressure from [National] Angels that our meetings should be a certain way or I should be doing a certain thing.”

— Volunteer

"[My mentor] just has this attitude that is like – I don't know. She's really forgiving, first of all. And she doesn't – I don't think she looks at my past too much. And that's really like, important to me. Because a lot of people that I speak to or connect with in CPS like, always have something to say about what I've been through or anything like that. And I just feel like she looks at me as another person. So, that makes me feel really comfortable around here. And she's super nice. Like, she'll do anything for me. She's like – checks up on me, stuff like that."

– Former Foster Youth

In addition to the emotional support of the mentoring relationship, a major component of the Dare to Dream program is the opportunity for youth to participate in normalcy activities, such as going to the movies, exploring nature, and playing sports. Volunteers were excited to share their hobbies and interests with youth, which in turn strengthened the bond and trust between the youth and volunteers.

A few caregivers really valued the Dare to Dream Program because it allowed for more adult support for the youth, and caregivers could have open communication with the mentor on issues or concerns with youth.

"My one child, she got really, really close to her mentor. She's no longer at my house. She's the one that ran away. But she would actually go there. She might stay there a night. She was the one that they wanted to give her the car. Yeah, they were pretty close. But she was able to really help her through some things because sometimes, she would call me and say, hey – obviously, the girl had some behavior problems. And so, she would say, hey, she said this, I'm wondering what's going on with this, and I'm like, I am so glad you brought that up. So, let's talk about what happened. And then she was able to go back to her and kind of say, okay, now let's look at it from a different perspective. And so, well, is that what really happened, or did this kind of really happen? And then she'd be like, well, that really happened, but – and it was just good."

– Caregiver

ONGOING SUPPORT FROM NATIONAL ANGELS

All volunteers and caregivers had positive feedback on the level of support received from National Angels. Particularly at the beginning of a match, volunteers described how supportive staff were in helping talk through situations, provide validation, and share resources for volunteers.

"From a support standpoint, I felt like the conversations that I had with the [National Angels] case manager that I've been working with for years – really helped me feel more prepared when it came to sensory topics [...] and just kind of walked me through why we handle things differently. Because of what they've been through, just in general, as a foster child, just not specific to any group or any specific child, [...] things to be aware of, how my behavior needs to adapt. So, that was great. I felt more prepared going into it because of those conversations, for sure."

– Volunteer

Caregivers also expressed how supported they have felt since day one with National Angels, and often

described how genuine, caring, and determined staff are. Several expressed how above and beyond the support from the whole organization has been for them.

"I have had the most amazing case managers. I have been able to call them for anything. They call and they check on me and the kids are like, 'Hey, do you need anything? How's court going? Do you need any help with CPS? Is there something going on with anything?' It's always been about our family. And it's been amazing because it's not only the connection with the actual mentor that they place you with; it's the support from the actual organization."

— Caregiver

Similarly, former foster youth were grateful for National Angels and appreciative of all the resources, connection, and support they received from the National Angles organization.

"I think that is such a powerful thing for foster youth that come out of the system because we don't know where to turn a lot of the times, and we don't know who to talk to or what resources to go to. And that can leave us a lot of confusion on where to go. You know what I mean? So, I think there, I feel like that was really the main thing for me that made me realize these were people that were lifetime friends, lifetime family."

— Former Foster Youth

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

STAFF FEEL SUPPORTED BY COLLEAGUES AND LEADERSHIP

A significant theme across all interviews with National Angels staff is the sense of camaraderie and support they feel from each other and their leadership. Staff must endure emotionally taxing situations with some cases that they work. Staff reported being able to work through challenges, celebrate victories, and collaborate to figure out solutions to challenging problems that families and youth face.

"I have never experienced the unity and the team that I have here. I feel like it's so rare that we have each other's backs, that we collaborate, and we work. I think those are really parallel, and it goes together, because I feel really supported in my role with my team, which makes me excited to invest in my families."

— National Angels Staff

NATIONAL ANGELS HAVE CLEAR EXPECTATIONS FOR VOLUNTEERS

The emphasis National Angels puts on setting clear expectations with volunteers about building relationships, being consistent, and making a long-term commitment is a major strength and success of both the Love Box and Dare to Dream programs. Volunteers were asked why they continued to have a relationship with family or youth beyond a year or why they are planning to, and volunteers directly explained that it was the intention of the program.

"[National Angels] wants to build a relationship that continues on past the year and I feel like we're there because our year is coming up in August and [my mentee] has brought up a couple times of like, 'Are you still gonna be my mentor? Are you still gonna be my mentor?' And since he's been adopted, we can't have an official establishment to our relationship through National Angels, but his aunt, expressed like, 'You know if you want to keep coming around, I'd love to still have you meeting with [him]' and [my mentee] wants me coming around. As long as I'm here in Austin, I'd love to keep meeting with him. So, I would think yeah, I mean I would like to think that it's achieving its goal, right?"

— Volunteer

Another volunteer described National Angels' expectation of continuity with youth, even during placement changes.

"One of the big takeaways – I got from the training effort was they really emphasized the idea that it was important to stay in touch with the families. So, the idea that if they did have a change in placement, they wanted you to follow. Well, my feeling is if these kids get adopted by the families who have been their fosters, that doesn't change the basic principle of why we're doing this, which is to provide long term relationships. So, the fact that they were adopted and therefore they're no longer part of the Love Box program as far as I'm concerned is irrelevant."

— Volunteer

PROGRAMMING PROMOTES RELATIONAL PERMANENCE AND LASTING SUPPORT

Each programs' focus on building genuine relationships is critical to establishing lasting support for families and youth. Family dynamics, personal backgrounds, and trauma histories can be overwhelming for volunteers, who are often new to the complexities of child welfare. National Angels' hierarchical strategy of focusing on relationships first helps ground volunteers in their purpose and clarifies roles for caregivers.

"And then not just [resources], it was just like, okay, whatever we do help you with, we wanna make sure it's gonna be something that's gonna impact your life forever. You know what I mean, that's gonna help you to move forward and be the best person that you can be. So, for me too, that was just a big thing because to have people that invest in you so much, not just financially, but with their love and just with saying, 'Hey, there's connections here and here. We want you know to connect you with these people, so we can make sure you're set over here, and you have a foundation for your family.'"

— Former Foster Youth

PROGRAMMING IS ADDRESSING NEEDS AND FILLING IN GAPS

All interviewees described how both programs have successfully addressed resource needs and social support for youth and families. Typically, the types of support provided to foster families cover items and services to survive, and often come at a cost to the caregiver in time, stress, and paperwork. Many caregivers in the Love Box program described how exciting it was to get some of those extra supports

with such ease.

“So, they’re [volunteers] able to get it, and it’s just –it’s just so – not overwhelming but very joyful that, oh, my gosh. Somebody else was able to do this. We don’t have to go look for it again. So, it does make a big difference in everybody’s life.”

– Caregiver

Youth also expressed how the Dare to Dream program addressed their need for support, friendship, and guidance.

“I feel like the other main reason would be just not having anybody there. I – not only support, but just like a friend. Like, I didn’t have anybody to talk to, or go do stuff with. So, a mentor was like, really good for that stuff.”

– Former Foster Youth

Volunteers also shared numerous examples of how they would serve as an ally and advocate to help youth navigate their path towards independence. Given that youth experiencing foster care often lack relational support from others, it is incredibly reassuring to have people help them by offering advice on how to access resources or simply get direction on what to do next.

“I tell [my mentee], ‘I’m here to support you. I’m not here to pressure you on doing anything. It’s your life, but if you need me for anything, absolutely ask me. And if I don’t know, I’m gonna find out.’”

– Dare to Dream Volunteer

CONSISTENCY IS INTEGRAL TO BUILDING TRUST

In all interviews, a theme of consistency and patience with foster youth and families was noted as key elements to building trust, which was discussed as the foundation to establishing a relationship with youth and families. Volunteers often discussed the importance of consistency and follow-through was well communicated as a key program component, a testament to the clear program expectations set forth by National Angels staff. Some mentors discussed how they were prepared to be patient with foster youth, allowing youth to open up and engage in the relationship when comfortable. One volunteer noted that while challenging to keep up, the consistency of communication and scheduled hangouts proved valuable in showing the commitment to youth that in turn helped earn trust and established their relationship.

“And [I] would be like, ‘How was your day?’ ‘It was okay.’ I’m like, ‘Cool. Anything’s going on?’ And it was just one-word answers. And this went on for a year. There just wasn’t a whole lot. And it wasn’t until second year that [my mentee] was really like, ‘Okay, hey, can you meet me today? I kinda have some serious stuff that I wanna talk through.’ [...] It definitely took a lot of time, but now – and that’s the thing. Asking for help is extremely difficult. And so, I understand that because I was in the exact same boat. And so, it was kind of great to see his behavior.”

– Volunteer

“I guess since I’ve just been in her life for five years, the same me, always there. I think that when you see that somebody is always there, that’s just automatically, you’re gonna trust them. And I’m very positive and open with her and nonjudgmental whenever we talk and whatever she wants to do. She can be who she wants. I think those two things naturally build trust.”

– Volunteer

UNPAID VOLUNTEERS HELP SIGNAL GENUINE INTENT FOR FAMILIES AND YOUTH

The unique aspect of National Angels programming is the reliance on unpaid volunteers to connect with families and youth. While there is great strength in professionals who are well-versed in child welfare, findings from interviews show that there is an inherent power structure present among paid staff, and many families and youth experience fatigue with an abundance of formal relationships. Caregivers and youth both described how the simple fact that volunteers were deciding to spend time with them, rather than being paid to spend time with them, signaled that the connection and check-ins were genuine and authentic. In turn, this enabled caregivers and youth to let their guards down and open up towards building a relationship.

“What I like about it is I see the people showing care for me towards helping out children, the care. Now, I love the food and stuff they bring is excellent. I love it. It’s the people that makes it so wonderful because this is a volunteer program. They do not have to do that. They take time out of their schedule to come over here to see about me. And I love it. It makes me stronger in what I’m doing because they care.”

– Caregiver

ESTABLISHING RELATIONAL PERMANENCE

In most cases, interviewees reported that long-lasting relationships between families, volunteers, and staff were established. These mutual bonds and relationships are integral to forming the lasting community of support. Some volunteers shared how much they have personally grown and been profoundly impacted by participating in National Angels programming.

"I think it's just taught me a lot. I don't know how to put it into words. It's just taught me a lot about – even more just about kids her age, and the way they're functioning. And it's just given me more patience, and sometimes, just puts things in perspective for me when I'm – I don't know. It has impacted me a lot, I just don't know how to put words to it."

– Volunteer

"I like knowing that we've made friends and family and supported kids. So, I just feel like we've made an impact and it's also made an impact on us. We've developed what I hope will be some lifelong relationships with these families."

– Volunteer

"I look at [my mentor] as like, a second mom. [...] We're really close, and we've grown like, a lot, since we've met each other. And I feel like it's just – we've had our ups and down, and I just feel like having a mentor in general is just, a positive thing to have."

– Former Foster Youth

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

TRAINING IS NOT SUFFICIENT

The top challenge observed was the need to improve training to adequately prepare volunteers for engaging with foster families. Many volunteers (N = 6) were appreciative of the training but did not feel prepared and were relying on more support and resources from the National Angels case manager. Some staff also agreed that training could be improved. Overall, training concerns were not mentioned by caregivers or former foster youth, which may indicate that volunteers need training to feel more prepared and confident.

CHALLENGES IN ADDRESSING BIASES

Staff discussed challenges in addressing biases and misconceptions with volunteers. Many staff felt that the volunteer training could include more education on biases, particularly on negative perceptions towards biological parents and mitigating savior-complex tendencies among volunteers. Additionally, given the demographics of systems-involved families, it is important to recognize that many volunteers may have backgrounds that differ from the families they serve in kinship capacities.

DARE TO DREAM MILESTONES ARE NOT AGE-APPROPRIATE FOR ALL YOUTH

Mentors who were matched with younger children found the Dare to Dream goal-setting milestones to not be fully applicable given the youth's current needs and capacity for learning the concepts. Some mentors instead focused on building a relationship and supporting their mentee, but others struggled with getting guidance and ideas for activities. However, it is important to mention that National Angels has a set of 10 milestones oriented for younger youth in Dare to Dream Jr.

“One thing I did as a mentor is: I kinda – there was all these milestones, and I just kinda threw the milestones out the window. I was like: I’m not gonna go in and just focus on we have to hit these milestones. Mainly because she’s like 13 and managing money, and things like thinking about – it’s just she was just so young.”

– Volunteer

MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH DURING PLACEMENT CHANGES

Several volunteers reported having difficulty maintaining connections with youth during placement changes. Some described situations where they were no longer close by, making it difficult to have in-person hangouts. Some volunteers found it to be distressing as they tried to keep the relationship going through phone calls, text messaging, and letter writing.

DIFFICULTY BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Understandably, the COVID-19 pandemic had some consequences for relationships. For some volunteers, in-person visitation was reduced due to lockdowns and health concerns. Some volunteers shared creative strategies to maintain connection with matched families, such as through socially distanced outdoor dinners. The lack of in-person opportunities also impeded newly matched families and volunteers who had several years of experience and were now on their second matched family expressed concerns that they were unable to build a relationship as easily after COVID.

“So, my biggest challenge has been having her where I can spend enough time with her in person. So, I continue to write letters and send packages and talk on the phone, but we haven’t been able to touch or hug or anything in over a year because of COVID. So, that’s been the toughest thing, is just spending time with each other in person.”

– Volunteer

CHALLENGES IN SETTING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES FOR VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers and staff both acknowledged challenges with establishing healthy boundaries with families. In some situations, staff must closely monitor the requests being made from families and ensure that they are appropriate and do not exceed the capacity of the volunteer, such as a family requesting that a volunteer help pay rent. For others, managing boundaries involved being mindful of the emotional capacity and burden that volunteers often feel when growing close with a family.

“[The] hardest part, I think maybe part of that is with my own personal trauma, it’s making sure you’re emotionally available to that person at all times.”

– Volunteer

PROGRAM SUGGESTIONS

This section shares themes of suggestions for the Love Box and Dare to Dream programs from caregivers, volunteers, and staff. All former foster youth did not describe any program suggestions and

were extremely thankful and pleased with National Angels staff and mentors.

MORE CONNECTION AND COLLABORATION AMONG VOLUNTEERS

A few volunteers ($N = 3$) wanted to have more connection and collaboration with other volunteers to share ideas and experiences. Some volunteers expressed feeling stuck on new activity ideas or needing more information on resources, without solely relying on National Angels case managers. Additionally, volunteers felt increased volunteer collaboration this would build an additional layer of community and support around foster families. Some volunteers described how useful it was to have an existing volunteer share their experiences during the training and suggested that the information would have been more beneficial at the beginning of their program involvement.

“I don't know how you'd do this because I know they tried some things to try to develop this. I would really like to get to know other Love Box leaders with them to share, talk with them, and know what they're doing and things like that. I know they've established a Facebook group that hasn't really had anything happen. They did the lunch and learns, but that was always learning something versus getting to know other leaders. So, that would probably be, but I don't know how you'd do it. So, I would like to know other Love Box leaders.”

— Volunteer

RECRUITING MORE MALE VOLUNTEERS AND YOUNGER MENTORS

One volunteer and one caregiver recommended diversifying volunteers to include more male adult figures for male foster youth to connect with. Another mentor in the Dare to Dream program suggested having younger volunteers who are closer in age to youth in order to better connect with them.

MORE TRANSPARENCY IN THE MATCHING PROCESS

Ensuring a good match at the beginning is important for successful program experiences for everyone and reaching intended goals of forming lasting relationships. A few caregivers were interested in learning more about the training and matching process and recommended meeting the prospective volunteers prior to securing the match. Another suggestion was sending caregivers a list of the different volunteers and their backgrounds and giving the family more input in the matching process. One caregiver felt that the volunteer was expecting younger children instead of teenagers, which was concerning to her as an appropriate match.

“But sometimes, I think that they are thinking about fostering themselves. They wanna see what it's all about. And they're expecting babies. And that's the other thing, [the volunteer will] kind of ask, what age-level families? Because, yes, I take a variety, but I really don't take under 11 [years old]. So, I'm not gonna have babies for them to play with and babysit.”

— Caregiver

MORE MEETINGS IN THE BEGINNING AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR THE DARE TO DREAM PROGRAM

Specific to the Dare to Dream Program, one mentor suggested having meetings with youth more frequently than once a month to put communication and relationship building in motion, and then taper it off to monthly or a frequency that the mentor and mentee prefer. Another programmatic suggestion was to have National Angels help organize field trips with other Dare to Dream mentors and mentees. One suggestion was to have a college visit day with other Dare to Dream participants as a way to have planned activities while also building relationships with other youth and volunteers, further expanding the community of support.

MORE GUIDANCE ON ACTIVITIES

Volunteers and caregivers suggested more guidance on activities and specific strategies on how to deepen connections with youth and families. One caregiver shared that at the beginning of the match, they were not sure what their Love Box volunteer could help with. This caregiver recommended that volunteers offer examples of things that they are willing to help with, so caregivers understand the type of resources and support they can ask for.

“I think an improvement would be for people who are just coming on as far as the foster parents go, we know we need support. But it's that guilt of, what should we be asking? And just make it a little more clearer because they do a needs assessment, and so it's like, hey, well, what do you need? Well, I have lots of needs, but what do they wanna do? And kind of when they say like, hey, are you looking for people who just drop off shampoo and toilet paper and help you out with that, or do you want people who are more here for time, or do you want the whole thing?”

— Volunteer

Volunteers also recommended having more guidance on activities that cover the range of ages served by National Angels programming. For example, one Love Box volunteer described challenges in finding new activities for toddlers, as most of the guidance was for older children. Dare to Dream mentors also wanted more guidance on younger children, since the program milestone goals were more geared towards older teens and independence.

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Caregivers and volunteers both described how beneficial National Angels programming is and wanted to connect their services to other organizations to expand its reach in serving families and gaining more volunteers. Some suggestions of other organizations were churches, CPS, and organizations that support foster youth.

“I just think that [National] Angels, it should be under an umbrella with CPS because they can only help so many people because I'm sure their funds are limited on what they can do. But I feel like if this was under the umbrella of CPS, they could do so much more because they would have money from the state to be able to help these families. So, I'm sure there's a limited amount of families that they can help this way.”

— Caregiver

PROGRAM IMPACTS

This section shares findings of the perceived program impacts of the Love Box and Dare to Dream programs and how they help promote the foster youth wellbeing indicators of relational permanency, normalcy, placement stability, and resilience.

IMPACTS TO RELATIONAL PERMANENCY

GENUINE RELATIONSHIPS ESTABLISH LONG-TERM SUPPORT

All interviewees discussed how programming was successful in creating genuine relationships between families and volunteers that resulted in establishing long-term and reliable support for families. Among staff, many shared that their favorite part of programming is witnessing long-term relationships being formed and seeing positive changes in youth and families.

"I think that, just seeing the outcomes of the matches together [...]. I have families on my caseload who were transferred down to me – whenever I started – that they were met with another case manager, and they switched to me. So, I've been with the youth. One of the mentors in the Dare to Dream program. They've been with the youth since she was 12. And it's five years later. So, it's just this lifelong bond. And we're able to do that."

– National Angels Staff

One former foster youth described how she established relational permanence with her mentor, which she now considers them as close as family.

"She's my best friend. She picks up my baby. She takes him to her house. They hang out. We go. We do our girl thing. We have dinner. She loves on my son and my daughter too...she loves him, her and her husband and their kids. They're like – I don't know – awesome with my kids. And now we're just like family."

– Former Foster Youth

IMPACTS TO PLACEMENT STABILITY

IMPROVED CAREGIVER RETENTION

All services and programming from National Angels were shown to alleviate caregiver stress, which helped caregivers continue to provide a stable home for youth. As mentioned throughout this report, caregivers of system-involved youth experience high levels of stress while attempting maintain a stable household, adhere to CPS policies, and help youth heal from past trauma. Building a community of support around a family by sharing resources and creating lasting relationships helps mitigate burnout among caregivers and improve caregiver retention. In the context of the desperate need of caregivers for foster youth, National Angels is working towards caregiver retention through their programming and services.

“I will add that without people like this [National Angels] caring and checking in, and having an extra level of support, I think that if every foster family had something like this available to them, I think there would be less families pulling out of the system.”

— Caregiver

“I’m telling you. I was about to give up. I was like, ‘You know what, I can’t do this no more, sorry. Pack your stuff and get out of my house,’ but thank God that didn’t have to get there, and with patience, love, and everybody else – like I said, all of the support that I’ve had, from foster, to [National Angels]. Everybody- the mentors, everybody that’s helped me out with [him]. It’s been really awesome.”

— Caregiver

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT HELPS CAREGIVERS KEEP YOUTH IN THEIR HOMES

National Angels staff recognize their role in supporting caregiver continuity. Staff were well-informed about the challenges that youth face with instability, and many reported having worked on cases where children and youth had frequent moves. Staff could clearly see the impact of their work in promoting stability and what positive benefits this had on the children they served.

“So that means one more child that’s not living in an office, or living in a group home, or wherever they may be. It’s one more child in a stable home.”

— National Angels Staff

When volunteers were asked if their involvement with the foster family or mentorship of youth had any impact on the youth’s placement stability, many volunteers were cautious to correlate their involvement to placement stability. Several suggested that even without their involvement, caregivers’ commitment to youth and their resilience would have continued to strengthen placement stability. However, volunteers were hopeful that their involvement helped contribute to stability through emotional support and relief of some stressors.

“I can tell you both of our families – and actually now with her grandkids – are extremely invested in these kids and I think even if we hadn’t been there, they would have still stayed invested and wanted to have gone through adoption with them. I think hopefully we made it a little – gave them some more resources and made it easier, but all three of the families have been really super invested in the kids.”

— Volunteer

Some volunteers described how their financial support was integral in helping caregivers care for their children.

"I think that the financial support that we provided to the second family especially made it possible for that grandmother to keep them financially. I don't think she would have been able to without that support."

— Volunteer

"[National] Angels has just been there. Just that extra rock. Because I don't know what CPS is supposed to do, versus what [National] Angels has done. [National] Angels has done just about anything. If I needed my – like one my time, my lights was gonna get cut off, and I called my Love Box office. And gave my account number, and my bill was paid."

— Caregiver

"I think that if I hadn't been able to get them an air-conditioned room that night, I would have felt like a failure as a parent. I would have failed them. But they were able to support that, and they made me be able to support my children."

— Caregiver

NORMALCY

IMPROVED CONFIDENCE AND SOCIALIZATION THROUGH NORMALCY ACTIVITIES

In both the Love Box and Dare to Dream programs, volunteers discussed how opportunities for youth to participate in normalcy activities contributed to improved self-confidence and socialization with other adults and peers. Particularly for the Dare to Dream Program, volunteers discussed how taking their mentee to outdoor activities or going to the movies was instrumental in building trust and proving to youth that they cared. Once this safety and trust was established and led by youth, volunteers often discussed a breakthrough of youth being able to feel safe to express themselves and in turn build confidence—not only in their relationship with their mentor, but also in their relationships with caregivers, other adults, and peers.

"I think he came from a situation where maybe he was not seen for who he was. For whatever reason, the family couldn't see him, understand and take care of his needs, got wrapped up in the foster care system, which sometimes is beneficial, sometimes it doesn't really help the problem...I think the Dare to Dream program and being provided with an adult who is going to be there no matter what, I think it provides the freedom and the safety for them to be more themselves."

— Volunteer

"Not being socially awkward. Like, I used to – I don't know. Just simple things, like ordering food or something like that. I feel like I – I feel like I've grown in that aspect of being more confident around confident people."

— Former Foster Youth

FOSTER YOUTH GAIN SUPPORT DURING THEIR TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD AND INDEPENDENCE

Among older foster youth who participated in the Dare to Dream program, volunteers and youth described how the mentorship aspect of the program helped youth gain support in goal setting and their transition to adulthood and independence. The former foster youth who were in extended foster care valued the support from their mentor with talking through future plans and achieving their goals.

“I hope to go to college because I’m taking advantage of that free college. That’s really important to me. And just growing as a person. And hopefully getting into the school that I want to get in. And having a steady job. And hopefully finding my own place to stay.”

– Former Foster Youth

“She’s just a really accomplished person who’s accessible to me, which is an opportunity that I wouldn’t normally have. I mean, I have the ability to call her or text her and ask her to go out to lunch and pick her brain about things. So, that’s really, really cool.”

– Former Foster Youth

Some mentors valued helping youth with the practical things that are necessary for the transition to adulthood, like acquiring a bank account.

“It’s [to] be a mentor but in a very practical way... I wish I had somebody helping me. How do you get a car? How do you get a loan for a car? How do you get a bank account? It was just things nobody taught me. And so, these are very practical – cool, we have these goals, if nothing else. Those are very dry things that are gonna be helpful no matter who it is. So, I really like that because I hadn’t really seen that before.”

– Volunteer

RESILIENCE

IMPROVED BEHAVIOR AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEERS AND ADULTS

Caregivers also shared that they’ve witnessed improved behavior among youth and improved youth relationships with others since participating in National Angels programming. Although there was a range of behaviors and past experiences among youth, many described an overall positive effect of volunteers’ engagement with youth. These observations may be attributed to the consistency of volunteers engaging with families through genuine connection and the fact that programming is often over one year, which is enough time to be able to see those changes.

“...the impacts on him that I can observe that he, at least in his relationship with me, is more open and more trusting and more receptive to any kind of guidance I might be able to provide. What his father has told me is that since we've began meeting, he's really – his behavior has improved, like with his relationship with his foster or adopted brothers has improved.”

– Volunteer

One caregiver described how her youth's relationship with the Dare to Dream mentor has helped improve their relationship and made her youth feel less isolated and more secure.

“But I think overall, the kids, they just do better. They feel like they have somebody. And even into adulthood, they feel like they're not alone. And even if their choices are completely not the right choices, they still feel like they can make those choices and still come back for support.”

– Caregiver

IMPROVED EDUCATION AND SCHOOL-INVOLVEMENT

Interviewees also described improved involvement in afterschool activities and education among youth. Some mentors discussed how they were able to help with tutoring, which was a huge help for caregivers. Mentors were also able to encourage youth to participate in afterschool activities such as team sports and help youth keep their grades up in order to continue to play. Although some youth experienced placement changes that would disrupt educational growth, having the Dare to Dream mentor ground them in their new school environment was helpful to recalibrate and focus on their educational goals.

“And so, [the caregiver] did say, ‘Well, he needs help with schooling.’ ‘Cool, I’ll tutor him and – until we find a tutor.’ So, in terms of that, that helps create less friction between them too because it’s also, I’m supporting the foster parent and the goals that they’ve talked about.”

– Mentor

National Angels programming and services have shown to have many positive impacts on both the foster youth and caregivers, which in turn help improve long-term placement stability, relational permanency, normalcy, and ultimately create resilience. By also involving volunteers, National Angels is building a network of care, support, and resilience at a community level.



Discussion

NATIONAL ANGELS PROGRAMMING GENERATES SOCIAL CAPITAL

The most significant benefit that National Angels programming has on families and children is the creation of social capital. Social capital is the culmination of strong relationships that provide tangible and emotional support, guidance, and companionship in times of need. In the literature review it was apparent that healthy and close relationships are key to ensuring wellbeing. This finding was reinforced through interviews with staff, volunteers, caregivers, and youth who were involved in National Angels programming. Staff work to recruit, train, and empower volunteers to serve families and children, thereby broadening connections for people who stand to benefit from having more social support in their lives.

SOCIAL CAPITAL CAN REDUCE HARDSHIPS

A demonstrable strength of National Angels' programming is the increased social capital that is conferred through the strong relationships that National Angels cultivates between its staff, volunteers, caregivers, and youth. The increase of social capital aids in reducing hardships experienced by families. Most, if not all, families served by National Angels experience at least some degree of hardship and challenges by virtue of caring for systems-involved children. Equally as important are the consequences that stem from the hardship. Families who endure more significant short-term challenges, such as issues with utilities, transportation, or housing, may find themselves in a crisis that could jeopardize the caregiver's immediate ability to provide a safe, nurturing environment for their children. Similarly, a viable placement option for children may be otherwise unavailable due to an outstanding

hardship that is not resolvable by the caregiver's own individual means. Herein is one of the true benefits of increased social capital: By creating a network of compassionate individuals who provide instrumental support to families, National Angels aids caregivers' abilities to provide care for children.

In the long term, mitigating these hardships produces crucial benefits that have long-lasting impacts on families and children. Reducing hardships helps maintain caregiver continuity by reducing stress and avoiding burnout, thereby increasing placement stability. Increased placement stability creates a strong foundation for children to thrive and develop important connections with others and is a prerequisite for relational permanence.

CULTIVATING RELATIONAL PERMANENCE

National Angels programming cultivates relational permanence in families and youth by promoting relationship-based interventions. The Love Box program is an effective tool for trust-building. At the start of the relationship, many caregivers have material needs that are met through the Love Box volunteers. However, these regular and frequent contacts give way to relational growth. Families' needs will often shift to more emotional and social support as the primary support received through the Love Box program. The most important aspect that generates these connections is consistency from volunteers who make genuine and authentic attempts to demonstrate their commitment to the families and children.

Similarly, the Dare to Dream program is designed with life-long relationships in mind. Mentors are tasked with helping youth on their journey to independence and creating opportunities to explore options for their futures, including careers

and higher education. Dare to Dream mentors become another trusted person in the foster youth's network, offering advice and serving as a life coach for youth.

Although volunteers initially sign up for a one-year commitment with National Angels, relationships built throughout this year do not have an expiration date. Findings showed that many families, volunteers, mentors, and youth were maintaining connection with each other for years after the initial program duration was over. This ongoing connection is a true testament to the quality of relationships that are forged as part of National Angels programming.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL RELATIONSHIPS ARE DIFFERENT

Informal relationships created by National Angels volunteers confer benefits that are fundamentally different than those that come from formal relationships with paid professionals. Caregivers recognized the authenticity of volunteers and believed that their volunteers cared about them because they knew that they were not paid to be in the program. Youth in the Dare to Dream program also recognized, over time, that the mentors who were there were present not because of financial motivations, but because they wanted to befriend the youth and work towards making their future goals come true.

NORMALCY BUILDS RELATIONSHIPS

Normalcy is an important feature of National Angels programming and has many benefits to the overall wellbeing of the child. Normalcy activities help to strengthen relationships with the child's caregivers by providing them with a positive outlet to funnel their energy and help ensure that the child is integrated in the community. Normalcy activities also help to build confidence in youth by improving their

socialization with peers and adults. Throughout our interviews, we learned how relationships were strengthened during outings such as camping, fishing, or simply hanging out and going to see a movie. These types of normal, everyday experiences are critical to advancing social development and skills. Findings confirmed that there were noticeable improvements in behaviors from children and youth who were able to participate in normalcy activities as a result of National Angels programming.

GAINING RESILIENCE THROUGH WELLBEING

National Angels programming sets the foundation for generating resilience in children and families by promoting wellbeing. As explored in the literature review, four key wellbeing indicators—placement stability, relational permanence, normalcy, and resilience—are critical factors in promoting positive experiences and may lead to better outcomes for families and children. For families, resilience comes in the form of caregiver continuity. Parenting can be challenging, and caregivers who provide foster care services often face increased difficulties due to the nature of the system. However, National Angels programming appears to help mitigate difficulties by providing instrumental emotional support to reduce these burdens. As a result, caregivers feel less burdened by challenges and can continue in their role. The benefits of their continuity for children are abundantly clear: Children experiencing foster care stand to thrive when their caregivers are adequately supported. When children experience placement stability, they have more opportunities to forge strong connections with their caregivers and others, broadening their social support system. Normalcy helps ensure that children continue to develop socially, gaining confidence in themselves as well as learning to trust others, which aids in securing relational permanence. The combination of these factors helps add to resilience and creates the conditions for youth to thrive.

LIMITATIONS

This process evaluation was a qualitative study; therefore, sample sizes were small and may not have reflected the experiences of all participants. Additionally, this study was conducted at the Austin, Texas chapter of National Angels, and findings may not apply for other National Angels chapters. A more robust program evaluation with a larger sample size would be needed to generalize results. Furthermore, the sample lacked diversity, particularly of male former foster youth, birth parents and birth family members, and a racial/ethnic diverse sample who participated in programming.



Recommendations

Based on the findings from this process evaluation, the TXICFW research team offers the following recommendations for National Angels' Love Box and Dare to Dream programs.

IMPROVE TRAINING AND ONBOARDING OF VOLUNTEERS

The research team recommends developing a more detailed training during the onboarding of volunteers and ongoing training that provides a deeper understanding of topics related to engaging with youth. Some topics to consider are trauma, youth development, and healthy relationships.

CREATE SPACE FOR VOLUNTEERS TO COLLABORATE AND CONNECT

The research team recommends National Angels create a space for volunteers to collaborate during their journeys in supporting foster youth and families. National Angels should help monitor this space to ensure that collaboration and sharing of support is trauma-informed and healthy for families.

RECRUIT MORE DIVERSE VOLUNTEERS

The research team recommends recruiting more diversity in the volunteer pool to include more male, younger, BIPOC, and LGBTQ people. This diversity in volunteers is needed in both programs, but especially in the Dare to Dream program, where youth can gain value through mentorship with an adult who has shared identities.

IMPROVE TRANSPARENCY OF THE MATCHING PROCESS FOR CAREGIVERS

The research team recommends sharing more

transparency about the matching process with caregivers and youth. When caregivers understand the process, this may help establish a good fit at the very beginning, which is essential for positive program experiences and successful long-term relationships.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE AND AGE-APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES FOR ALL AGES

The research team recommends National Angels to provide more guidance and age-appropriate activities that cover the range of ages served in the Love Box and Dare to Dream Programs. Particularly for the Dare to Dream Program, National Angels should ensure that volunteers are familiar with the Dare to Dream Junior handbook and activities. While the National Angels program created a Dare to Dream Junior handbook, it is unclear if the volunteers had access to it or referenced when they had younger mentees.

INCREASE CONNECTION WITH BIRTH FAMILIES

The research team recommends National Angels increase connection to birth families (when appropriate), in order to build upon their mission of supporting the whole family. The strength National Angels has in building relationships can be extended to help improve relationships with birth families.



Next Steps

The literature review and findings suggest that National Angels programming may have transformative impacts on children, youth, and families but more exploration into these concepts is needed. An outcome evaluation that aims to measure the direct impact could be crucial to better understanding the effect that National Angels programming has on promoting stability, securing relational permanence, creating normalcy, and establishing resilience. The research team will collaborate with National Angels staff to determine what program changes, if any, should be made and revisit the logic model to better align any changes to program activities to the intended outcomes. The research team will also develop an evaluation plan that outlines the research design, including the data collection tools to examine impacts. Additionally, the research team will work closely with staff to examine the type of data that is currently being collected by the National Angels database and consider what components could be used in the outcome evaluation.



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Appendix A: Data Collection Tools

Pre-Interview Survey

CONSENT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INTERVIEW

This interview is part of a study is being conducted by researchers at The University of Texas at Austin - Texas Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing (TXICFW). TXICFW researchers are talking with Austin Angels staff, volunteers, caregivers, and former foster youth about their opinions, experience with, and observations of the Austin Angels Programming. The goal is to understand the perceptions and impacts of the program to help inform a program evaluation for Austin Angels.

WHAT AM I BEING ASKED TO DO?

Participate in a 45 minute to 1 hour interview with a researcher over the phone or Zoom video.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS INVOLVED IN THIS STUDY?

We believe that there is little risk for you to be harmed in this study. There is always a small chance that someone might look through your responses, but your name and any other information that would identify you and will not be written on any research form. You can skip any question you do not want to answer. Skipping questions or stopping the interview will not impact your relationship with the program, school, or the UT Austin research team.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, there is a potential benefit that this information might help program developers, foster families, and youth in foster care in the future.

DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?

No, your participation is voluntary. You should only participate if you want to. You can decide to participate now but later change your mind. That is okay. If you decide not to participate, you will not hurt your relationship with Austin Angels or The University of Texas at Austin.

WILL THERE BE ANY COMPENSATION?

For Austin Angels Staff & Volunteers: There will be no compensation for participating in the study.

For Caregivers & Former Foster Youth: To thank you for participating in the study, you will receive an electronic \$25 gift card. This gift card will be e-mailed to you at the end of the interview. You will have the option to select which type of gift card you want (e.g., Amazon, Target, Walmart).

WHO IS GOING TO KNOW INFORMATION ABOUT ME?

This study is confidential and your responses to the questions will not be linked to your identity. Results will only be reported in aggregate form. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. All audio recordings will be stored securely and only the research team will have access to the

recordings. Recordings will be kept for up to five years and then erased.

WHO DO I TALK TO IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have questions about the interview, contact Dr. Monica Faulkner, who is the lead researcher for this research project. You can contact Dr. Faulkner by email at mfaulkner@mail.utexas.edu. You can also ask any questions to your researcher who will be in contact with you before, during, or after your interview.

Do you agree to participate in this interview? By clicking "I agree", I acknowledge that I have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks.

- Yes, I agree to participate
- No, I do not agree to participate

GROUP

1. What best describes your involvement with Austin Angels? Select all that apply.
 - Former foster youth who participates (or has participated) in Dare to Dream
 - Biological parent of a child who is or has been in foster care
 - Caregiver of a child who participates (or has participated) in Dare to Dream
 - Caregiver whose family participates (or has participated) in the Love Box Program
 - Dare to Dream Mentor
 - Love Box Volunteer
 - Austin Angels Employee or Intern
 - [If "Former foster youth who participates (or has participated) in Dare to Dream" is selected for Q1] Are you currently participating in Dare to Dream?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say
 - [If "Caregiver of a child who participates (or has participated) in Dare to Dream" is selected for Q1] How many children in your household have participated or are currently participating in Dare to Dream?
 - text entry response
 - [If "Caregiver of a child who participates (or has participated) in Dare to Dream" is selected for Q1] Are any of these children currently participating in Dare to Dream?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say
 - [If "Caregiver whose family participates (or has participated) in the Love Box program" is

selected for Q1] Is your family currently participating in the Love Box Program?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

2. [If “Dare to Dream Mentor” is selected for Q1] Are you currently a Dare to Dream Mentor?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

3. [If “Love Box Volunteer” is selected for Q1] Are you currently a Love Box Volunteer?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

This block is shown if “Former foster youth who participates (or has participated) in Dare to Dream” is selected in Q1.

4. How long have you been participating (or did you participate) in Dare to Dream?

Less than one year

At least one year

Prefer not to say

[If “Less than one year” is selected in Q8] How many months?

Text entry response

5. [If “At least one year” is selected in Q8] How many years?

Text entry response

CAREGIVERS

This block is shown if “Caregiver whose child participates (or has participated) in Dare to Dream” in or “Caregiver whose family participates (or has participated) in the Love Box Program” Q1.

6. How long has your family been participating (or did your family participate) in the Love Box Program?

Less than one year

At least one year

Prefer not to say

- [If “Less than one year” is selected in Q11] How many months?

Text entry response

7. [If “At least one year” is selected in Q11] How many years?

Text entry response

8. How long has your child been participating (or did your child participate) in Dare to Dream?

Less than one year

At least one year

Prefer not to say

- [If “Less than one year” is selected in Q14] How many months?

Text entry response

9. [If “At least one year” is selected in Q14] How many years?

Text entry response

ABOUT YOUR ROLE AS A CAREGIVER

10. What is your role as a caregiver? Select all that apply.

Biological parent of a child in foster care (or of a child who was in foster care)

Foster Parent

Kinship Caregiver

Adoptive Parent

Permanent Managing Conservator / Legal Guardian

Other, please describe:

Prefer not to say

11. [If Foster Parent, Kinship Caregiver, Adoptive Parent, or Permanent Managing Conservator/Legal Guardian is selected in Q17] How long have you been a foster, kinship, adoptive parent or guardian?

Less than one year

At least one year

Prefer not to say

- [If “Less than one year” is selected in Q18] How many months?

Text entry response

12. [If “At least one year” is selected in Q18] How many years?

Text entry response

ABOUT YOUR HOUSEHOLD

13. How many adult caregivers, including yourself, live in your household?

Text entry response

14. How many children under the age of 21 do you currently live in your household?
(Please include biological, adoptive, foster, step-children, or any other child that depends on you for support)

Text entry response

15. How many of these children are in foster care or kinship care? (Please include biological, adoptive, foster, step-children, or any other child that depends on you for support)

Text entry response

VOLUNTEERS

16. [If “Dare to Dream Mentor” is selected for Q1] How long have you been (or were you) a Dare to Dream mentor?

- Less than one year
- At least one year
- Prefer not to say
- [If “Less than one year” is selected in Q24] How many months?

Text entry response

17. [If “At least one year” is selected in Q24] How many years?

Text entry response

18. [If “Love Box Volunteer” is selected for Q1] How long have you been (or were you) a Love Box volunteer?

- Less than one year
- At least one year
- Prefer not to say
- [If “Less than one year” is selected in Q27] How many months?

Text entry response

19. [If “At least one year” is selected in Q27] How many years?

Text entry response

PROFESSIONALS

- [If “Austin Angels Employee or Intern is selected in Q1] What is your role in at Austin Angels?
Select all that apply.

- Case Manager
- Program Director
- Executive Staff
- Intern
- Other, please describe:
- Prefer not to say

20. How long have you worked at Austin Angels?

- Less than one year
- At least one year
- Prefer not to say

21. [If "Less than one year" is selected in Q31] How many months?

Text entry response

22. [If "At least one year" is selected in Q31] How many years?

Text entry response

23. How long have you worked in child welfare?

- Less than one year
- At least one year
- Prefer not to say

24. [If "Less than one year" is selected in Q37] How many months?

Text entry response

25. [If "At least one year" is selected in Q37] How many years?

Text entry response

26. In your professional role at Austin Angels, which programs are you involved with? Select all that apply.

- Dare to Dream Program
- Love Box Program
- Neither Dare to Dream nor Love Box Programs
- Prefer not to say

HOUSING & SUPPORTS

This block is shown if Caregiver, Former Foster Youth, or Biological Parent is selected in Q1.

Note: Questions 33 and 34 in this section is gathered from a validated homelessness scale, originally validated for a veteran population (*Montgomery A.E. et al., 2014*).

27. In the past 2 months, have you been living in stable housing that you own, rent, or stay in as part of a household?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

28. Are you worried or concerned that in the next 2 months you may not have stable housing that you own, rent, or stay in as part of a household?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

29. [If Former foster youth is not selected in Q1] What was your total household income last year?

- Less than \$20,000
- \$20,000 - \$34,999
- \$35,000 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 - \$74,999
- \$75,000 or more
- Prefer not to say

30. Did your family receive any of the following supports last year? Select all that apply.

- Medicaid
- SNAP Food Benefits
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Unemployment Benefits
- COVID-19 Related Assistance
- Other, please describe: _____
- None of the above
- Unsure or prefer not to say

31. [If Former Foster Youth is not selected in Q1] What is your current relationship status? (caregivers only)

- Single, never married, and not living with partner
- In a romantic relationship, never married, and not living with a partner
- Married
- Separated
- Divorced

- Widowed
- Other, please describe:
- Prefer not to say

DEMOGRAPHICS

ABOUT YOU

32. What is your current employment status?

- Employed full time (40 or more hours per week)
- Employed part-time (up to 39 hours per week)
- Unemployed and currently looking for work
- Unemployed and not currently looking for work
- Student
- Retired
- Homemaker
- Self-employed
- Unable to work
- Other, please describe:
- Prefer not to say

33. What is the highest degree of education you've completed?

- No degree
- High school diploma or GED
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate or professional degree
- Prefer not to say

34. What is your age?

- 18 - 24 years old
- 25 - 34 years old
- 35 - 44 years old
- 45 - 54 years old

55 – 64 years old

65 – 74 years old

75 years or older

Prefer not to say

35. What is your gender?

Male

Female

Non-binary

Transgender

Prefer to self-describe:

Prefer not to say

36. What best describes your race/ethnicity? Select all that apply.

American Indian or Alaskan Native

Asian or Asian American

Black or African-American

Hispanic, Latino/x, or Spanish Origin

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

White

Prefer to self-describe: _____

Other, please describe:

Prefer not to say

Thank you for completing the survey. Your responses have been recorded.

Staff Interview Guide

Lead In: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. Before we begin, I would like to explain the purpose of this interview in greater detail and address any questions you may have about this research. Researchers at the University of Texas at Austin are contracting with Austin Angels to assess and evaluate their services afforded through the “Love Box” and “Dare to Dream” programs. We are seeking to have an open conversation with staff like you who are involved in these programs to get a better sense of how things work in your organization. We want your honest feedback about your experiences with Austin Angels programming. There are no right or wrong answers and any information you provide us will not have your name attached to it. This interview will take approximately 20 minutes. Do you have any questions before we begin?

[Address any questions]

Are you comfortable with me making an audio recording for transcription purposes?

Background Experience

- Tell me a little bit about yourself. How long have you been working at Austin Angels? What is your role? What motivated you to work for Austin Angels?
- How did you learn about Austin Angels? What was your previous knowledge or experience with child welfare and trauma before coming to Austin Angels?
- What hopes did you have in becoming part of Austin Angels?
- What is the best part of working here? What has been the hardest part?

Staff Experience with Families

- How do families come into contact with Austin Angels?
- What is your role in this process?
- What is your experience in working with families/youth?
- How often do you meet with them? How do you meet?
- What are some of the things you discuss with families/youth?
- How do you support them?
- What do you like most about working with families/youth? What are some challenges?
- Since you’ve started working with Austin Angels, in what ways, if any, have your own perceptions changed regarding foster, kinship, and birth families?

Onboarding Experience with Volunteers

- How do volunteers get involved with Austin Angels?

-
- What is your role in this process?
 - What is your experience with volunteers?
 - How often do you meet with them? How do you meet?
 - What are some of the things you discuss with the volunteers?
 - How do you support them?
 - What are some of the characteristics that Austin looks for in volunteers?
 - What do you like most about working with volunteers? What do you find most challenging?
 - What are some of the common biases you notice in your volunteers? Prompt: Bias can be related to race, poverty, the role of birth families in child welfare, as well as other topics.
 - How do you address these issues? In what ways has Austin Angels prepared you to have these conversations?

Onboarding Volunteers

- In what ways are you involved in onboarding volunteers?
- [Skip if not involved]
- What specific criteria does a person need to meet in order to become volunteer?
- How does Austin Angels prepare volunteers to work with families/youth?
- What trainings do volunteers participate in? What topics were covered? Who provides these trainings?
- How do you know when volunteers are ready to work with families/youth? From your perspective, how prepared are volunteers when they first start working with families/youth?
- What happens if a volunteer is not ready to work with families/youth?
- What are some strengths of the onboarding training? What could be improved?

Love Box Program

- Are you involved with the Love Box program? *If yes, ask the following questions:*
- What is your role in the Love Box program?
- Can you tell me about the needs assessment process? How do you identify or ensure that a family's needs are met?
- How do you coordinate Love Box goods/services between volunteers and families?
- How is this coordination of Love Box goods/services impacted with changes in child's placement/permanency status?
- How do you support the volunteers in the Love Box program?
- What do you like most about this program? What are some things that can be improved?

-
- Is there any more information about the Love Box program that you'd like to share?

Dare to Dream

- Are you involved with the Dare to Dream program? *If yes, ask the following questions:*
- What is your role in the Dare to Dream program?
- What is your role in the goal-setting process? How do you monitor this?
- How do you support your mentors work in facilitating the youth's goals/dreams?
- How do you coordinate Dare to Dream activities between mentors and youth?
- How is this coordination Dare to Dream activities impacted with changes in child's placement/permanency status?
- How do you support mentors in their work with their matched youth?
- What are some common challenges you hear from mentors/families? How do you address these challenges?
- What do you like most about this program? What are some things that can be improved?
- Is there any more information about the Dare to Dream program that you'd like to share?

Normalcy

- What are some of the ways that the Love Box program and Dare to Dream provide normalcy for children?
- What do you do specifically in your role to support normalcy?

Relational Permanence

- What are some of the ways that the Love Box program and Dare to Dream promote relational permanence for children?
- What do you do specifically in your role to support relational permanence?

Placement Stability

- How does your work contribute to placement stability?

Closing: That was the last of my questions. I want to thank you for taking the time to speak with me and share your thoughts and experiences as a result of participating in Austin Angels programs. Are there any questions that I should have asked, but did not, or is there any additional information you would like to add? [Await response]. Okay I will now turn off the recorder, if I can keep you on the phone for a few minutes I will debrief and provide information on the gift card. Thank you again for your time."

Volunteer Interview Guide

Lead In: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. Before we begin, I would like to explain the purpose of this interview in greater detail and address any questions you may have about this research. Researchers at the University of Texas at Austin are contracting with Austin Angels to assess and evaluate their services afforded through the “Love Box” and “Dare to Dream” programs. We are seeking to have an open conversation with volunteers like you who are involved in these programs to get a better sense of how these impact your life. We want your honest feedback about your experiences with these programs. There are no right or wrong answers and any information you provide us will not have your name attached to it. This interview will take approximately 20 minutes. Do you have any questions before we begin?

[Address any questions]

Are you comfortable with me making an audio recording for transcription purposes?

Background Experience

- Tell me a little bit about yourself. What motivated you to become a volunteer/mentor?
- How did you learn about Austin Angels? How long have you been participating in their program? What was your previous knowledge about child welfare and trauma before coming to Austin Angels?
- What hopes did you have as a volunteer? What concerns or worries did you have about becoming a volunteer? Did you have any concerns about working with systems-involved families/youth? Did you have any concerns about working with Austin Angels?
- What is the best part of being a volunteer? What has been the hardest part?

Onboarding Experience

- What was your onboarding experience like?
- How did Austin Angels prepare you to work with families/youth? What trainings did you participate in? What topics were covered? Who provided these trainings?
- How prepared did you feel when you first started working with families/youth?
- Looking back now, what could have Austin Angels done differently to help you feel more prepared? What knowledge was most helpful? What was missing?
- Can you tell me about the
- Did you have any biases or assumptions about families involved in child welfare [foster youth,

foster parents, birth parents] that changed since you began participating in Austin Angels?

- Has Austin Angels helped address any of these biases or assumptions about families involved in child welfare. If so, how? If not, how could they be more supportive in this area?
- How have your perceptions of birth family shifted?

Austin Angels Programming

- What is your experience with your case manager? How would you describe your relationship with them? How has it changed over time?
- What is your experience with your matched family/youth? How would you describe your relationship with them? How has it changed over time?

Love Box Program

- How would you describe the Love Box program? [follow up: What is your overall experience with the Love Box program?]
- What kind of things do you provide through the Love Box program? How frequently do you provide these good/services through the Love Box program?
- How do you know how to get the things the family needs?
- What is do you like most about this program? What are some things that can be improved?
- What are some specific impacts that the Love Box program has had on the family you work with?
- [If matched child has had placement changes during participation in the Love Box Program] Can you tell me about your experience in working with your matched child/children after they have changed placements/permanency status?
- How do you build an intentional relationship with your matched family/child?
- What are some impacts that the Love Box Program has had on you as a volunteer?
- Are there any experiences with the Love Box program that you'd like to share?

Normalcy

- How does your work promote normal experiences for your matched youth/family?
- What is your role in providing access to everyday age-appropriate activities or experiences? If so, please explain
- What changes have you seen as a result of your assigned child participating in these activities? [Probe: are there any impacts on their behavior/relationship with you?]

Relational Permanence

- Do you believe your matched family/child participation in this program has any impact in their overall relationship with you? If so, how? How does your matched family/child perceive you? When do you feel like your relationship moved from an assigned one to an organic one?How

close do you feel to your assigned child/family? How has this relationship changed over time?

- How are the child's relationships with their caregivers?
- How are the child's relationships with siblings?
- How are the child's relationship with peers?
- How are the relationships with the child's bio family?

Dare to Dream

- Can you describe the Dare to Dream program?
- How often do you meet with your matched youth?
- What is do you like most about this program? What are some things that can be improved?
- How do you involve your matched youth in the goal-setting process for the Dare to Dream program?
- Since participating in the Dare to Dream program, does your matched youth have a more concrete vision for their future? What is it they plan to do? How have you helped facilitate these goals/dreams?
- What specific impacts has this program had on your matched youth?
- What specific impacts has this program had on you as a volunteer?
- Have you seen any impact on the youth's life skills as a result of their participation in Dare to Dream? For example, household management skills such as cooking, employment related skills, social/emotional improvements, peer connections, making good decisions?
- [For older youth] How has the Dare to Dream program impacted your matched youth's preparation for independence?
- [For younger youth] How has the Dare to Dream program impacted your matched youth's individuality?
- [If matched youth has had placement changes during participation in Dare to Dream] Can you tell me about your experience in working with your matched youth after they have changed placements?
- How did you become a trusted person in the youth's voice?

Placement Stability

- From your perspective, how does your role as a volunteer impact the overall stability of the child's placement?
- How does your work impact your matched families' ability to continue being a caregiver for children in foster/kinship care?

Volunteer Continuity

- [If volunteer has not exceeded initial commitment] Do you plan on staying connected with this family/child after your contractual commitment ends? Why/why not?
- [If volunteer has exceeded initial commitment] What impacted your decision to stay connected

to your assigned family/child after your contractual commitment ended?

Closing: That was the last of my questions. I want to thank you for taking the time to speak with me and share your thoughts and experiences as a result of participating in Austin Angels programs. Are there any questions that I should have asked, but did not, or is there any additional information you would like to add? [Await response]. Okay I will now turn off the recorder, if I can keep you on the phone for a few minutes I will debrief and provide information on the gift card. Thank you again for your time.”

Caregiver Interview Guide

Lead In: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. Before we begin, I would like to explain the purpose of this interview in greater detail and address any questions you may have about this research. Researchers at the University of Texas at Austin are contracting with Austin Angels to assess and evaluate their services afforded through the “Love Box” and “Dare to Dream” programs. We are seeking to have an open conversation with caregivers like you who are involved in these programs to get a better sense of how these impact your life. We want your honest feedback about your experiences with these services. There are no right or wrong answers and any information you provide us will not have your name attached to it. This interview will take approximately 20 minutes. Do you have any questions before we begin?

[Address any questions]

Are you comfortable with me making an audio recording for transcription purposes?

Background Experience

- Can you give me some basic information on your household? Are you a foster parent or kinship caregiver? How long have you been fostering/a kinship caregiver? How many children are living in your home?
- What motivated you to foster parent/kinship caregiver? What concerns or worries did you have about becoming a foster parent/kinship caregiver? What preparations did you have to make before becoming a foster parent/kinship caregiver for children?
- Can you describe the relationship you have with your foster/substitute children?

Austin Angels Programming

- How did you learn about Austin Angels? How long have you been participating in their program? What motivated you to participate?
- What is your experience with your case manager? How would you describe your relationship with them? How has it changed over time?
- What is your experience with your volunteer? How would you describe your relationship with them? How has it changed over time?

Love Box Program

-
- How would you describe the Love Box program? [follow up: What is your overall experience with the Love Box program?]
 - What kind of things do you get through the Love Box program? How frequently do you receive these good/services through the Love Box program?
 - How do you get the things you need through the Love Box program?
 - What is do you like most about this program? What are some things that can be improved?
 - What are some specific impacts that the Love Box program has had on your ability to provide continuous care for your foster/substitute children?
 - Has the Love Box program helped you feel supported as a parent? If so, why?
 - Since participating in this program, what changes have you observed in your family, children, home life?
 - Are there any experiences with the Love Box program that you'd like to share?

Dare to Dream

- Can you describe the Dare to Dream program?
- How often does the Dare to Dream mentor meet with your child?
- What is do you like most about this program? What are some things that can be improved?
- How much say does your child have in the overall planning process for the Dare to Dream program?
- Since participating in the Dare to Dream program, does your child have a more concrete vision for their future? What is it they plan to do? How has Dare to Dream helped facilitate these goals?
- What specific impacts has this program had on your child?
- Have you seen any impact on the child's life skills as a result of their participation in Dare to Dream? For example, household management skills such as cooking/cleaning, employment related skills, social/emotional improvements, peer connections, making good decisions?
- How has the Dare to Dream program impacted your child's preparation for independence?

Normalcy

- How does participating in this program impact your child's ability to live as normal of a life as possible?
- Does your child have access to age-appropriate activities or experiences because of Austin Angels? If so, please explain
- What changes have you seen as a result of your child participating in these activities? [Probe: are there any impacts on their behavior/relationship with you?]

Relational Permanence

- Do you believe your child's participation this program has any impact in their overall relationship with you? If so, how? How close do you feel to your foster/substitute children? How has this relationship changed over time?

-
- How are the child's relationship with peers?
 - How are the relationships with the child's bio family?

Placement Stability

- Did your children in care/kinship children have any frequent moves before coming to your home?
- If YES, how has your home been able to maintain your child's living situation?
- If NO, are you concerned that your child may move in the future?
- How might this program help keep kids in your home?

Caregiver Continuity

- We understand that fostering can be an enormous challenge for many caregivers. What supports does Austin Angels offer to encourage you to continue fostering/being a kinship caregiver?
- Have there been times where you felt as if you could not continue to foster? If so, why?
- Do you believe you might have stopped fostering without Austin Angels help?
- [If yes, probe for example]
- What types of support does Austin Angels provide that is missing from your Child Placement Agency or not provided by Child Protective Services?

Closing: That was the last of my questions. I want to thank you for taking the time to speak with me and share your thoughts and experiences as a result of participating in Austin Angels programs. Are there any questions that I should have asked, but did not, or is there any additional information you would like to add? [Await response]. Okay I will now turn off the recorder, if I can keep you on the phone for a few minutes I will debrief and provide information on the gift card. Thank you again for your time."

Young Adult Interview Guide

Lead In: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. Before we begin, I would like to explain the purpose of this interview in greater detail and address any questions you may have about this research. Researchers at the University of Texas at Austin are contracting with Austin Angels to assess and evaluate their services afforded through the “Love Box” and “Dare to Dream” programs. We are seeking to have an open conversation with young adults like you who have been involved in these programs to get a better sense of how these impacts your life. We want your honest feedback about your experiences with these services. There are no right or wrong answers and any information you provide us will not have your name attached to it. This interview will take approximately 20 minutes. Do you have any questions before we begin?

[Address any questions]

Are you comfortable with me making an audio recording for transcription purposes?

Background Experience

- Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? How long were you in foster/kinship care?
- Can you describe the relationship you have/had with your last caregiver? [Pertaining to Austin Angels Experience]
- What are some of the goals you’ve been working on recently?

Austin Angels Programming

- How did you learn about Austin Angels? How long have you been participating in their program? What motivated you to participate?
- What is your experience with your case manager/Austin Angels staff? How would you describe your relationship with them? How has it changed over time?
- What is your experience with your mentor? How would you describe your relationship with them? How has it changed over time?
- What was the specific turning point when you realized this person cared about you and that you could talk with them openly?
- What has Austin Angels helped you with the most? What do you wish they could have helped you more with?

Normalcy

-
- What were some of the things you enjoyed doing most when you were living in foster care? Why were they important?
 - Did Austin Angels have any role in these things?
 - Did you work while in foster care? How was that experience? What were some important things you learned about working?
 - Are there any barriers to getting a job?
 - What do relationships with people your age look like? Tell me about your friends? Can you describe your experiences with dating partners?

Relational Permanence

- Who is important in your life right now? What about when you were in foster care? What makes them important?
- Do you stay connected with former caregivers? Why/why not?
- Do you stay connected with Austin Angels staff or mentors?
- Thinking about when you first met the staff/mentor to now, how did your relationship change over time?

Dare to Dream

- In your own words, can you describe the Dare to Dream program?
- How often do/did you meet with your dare to dream mentor?
- What is do you like most about this program? What are some things that can be improved?
- How much say did you have in the goal-setting process for the Dare to Dream program?
- How did participating in the Dare to Dream program impact your vision for your future? How has Dare to Dream helped facilitate these goals?
- Have you gained any new life skills as a result of participating in Dare to Dream? For example, household management skills such as cooking, employment related skills, social/emotional improvements, peer connections, making good decisions?
- How has the Dare to Dream program impacted your preparation for independence?
- Did you have your personal documents, such as identification/drivers license, birth certificate, social security card, etc?
- Did your mentor/Austin Angels help with getting these documents?
- [If currently involved with a mentor] Do you plan on staying connected to your mentor after your participation in Dare to Dream ends?

Placement Stability

- Did your have any placement changes once you participated in Dare to Dream?
- If YES, how were you able to stay connected with Dare to Dream?

-
- If NO, did participating in Dare to Dream have any impact on your stability?
 - [Assess disruptions and inquire if Austin Angels/mentors assisted with challenges]

Closing: That was the last of my questions. I want to thank you for taking the time to speak with me and share your thoughts and experiences as a result of participating in Austin Angels programs. Are there any questions that I should have asked, but did not, or is there any additional information you would like to add? [Await response]. Okay I will now turn off the recorder, if I can keep you on the phone for a few minutes I will debrief and provide information on the gift card. Thank you again for your time.”

Appendix B: Data Tables

Tables 1–4 provides a demographic snapshot of each participant group. Due to a small sample size, some data points are combined or not included to protect individual level data.

Table 1. National Angels Staff Demographics

STAFF DEMOGRAPHICS (n=8)		
	n	%
Staff is female*	8	100%
Staff is hispanic or latino	1	13%
Staff's race		
White	6	75%
Unknown	2	25%
Staff's age		
18–24 years old	1	13%
25–34 years old	4	50%
35–44 years old	1	13%
45–54 years old	1	13%
Unknown	1	13%
Staff's highest level of education		
Bachelor's degree	5	62%
Master's degree	3	38%

Table 2. Volunteer Demographics

VOLUNTEER DEMOGRAPHICS (n=10)		
	<i>n</i>	%
Volunteer is female*	7	70%
Volunteer is hispanic or latino	1	10%
Volunteer's race		
White	8	80%
Unknown	2	20%
Volunteer's age		
18-24 years old	1	10%
25-34 years old	1	10%
35-44 years old	3	30%
45-54 years old	1	10%
55-64 years old	3	30%
Unknown	1	10%
Volunteer's highest level of education		
High school diploma or GED	1	10%
Some college	1	10%
Bachelor's degree	4	40%
Master's degree	3	30%
Unknown	1	10%
Volunteer is employed full time	4	40%

Table 3. Caregiver Demographics

CAREGIVER DEMOGRAPHICS (n=10)		
	<i>n</i>	%
Caregiver is female*	10	100%
Caregiver is hispanic or latino	3	30%
Caregiver's race		
White	5	50%
Black	3	30%
Unknown	2	20%
Caregiver's age		
25-34 years old	2	20%
45-54 years old	3	30%
55-64 years old	4	40%
65-74 years old	1	30%
Caregiver's highest level of education		
High school diploma or GED	1	10%
Some college	1	10%
Bachelor's degree	3	30%
Master's degree	3	30%
Unknown	2	20%
Caregiver is employed full time	5	50%
Household income in 2020		
Less than \$20,000	1	10%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	1	10%
\$75,000 or more	3	30%
Unknown	5	50%

Table 4. Former Foster Youth Demographics

FORMER FOSTER YOUTH DEMOGRAPHICS (n=3)		
	n	%
Youth is female*	3	100%
Youth is hispanic or latino	1	33%
Youth's race		
White	2	66%
Self-describe	1	33%
Youth's age		
18-24 years old	2	66%
25-34 years old	1	33%
Youth's highest level of education		
High school diploma or GED	2	66%
Some college	1	33%
Youth living in stable housing	3	100%



The University of Texas at Austin

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Steve Hicks School of Social Work