

EVIDENCE2SUCCESS IN PROVIDENCE

using programs that work

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION





Evidence2Success promotes healthy child development by supporting public investment in programs proven to help young people. Evidence2Success was developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private charitable organization dedicated to improving the lives of children and their families, and several partner organizations.

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hen allocating scarce resources to improve outcomes for children and families, states and localities too often end up funding programs that lack both evidence of effectiveness and input from the people they are designed to help. Public systems today rarely use, much less take to scale, the growing number of programs and practices that have been rigorously evaluated and shown to be effective. Because service decisions based on data and evidence lead to smarter investments on behalf of children, the Annie E. Casey Foundation is committed to increasing both the supply and the use of evidence-based programs. Working with several partners, the Foundation has developed Evidence2Success, which combines multiple proven strategies into a unified prevention framework.

The Evidence2Success framework has five core elements:

- Partnerships among public systems, elected officials and communities
- Strategic use of local data to identify needs and develop a consensus among partners on outcomes
- Financing strategies to map current investments, to shift funding to cost-effective prevention programs and to secure sustainable funding
- Capacity building to implement evidence-based programs
- Measurement of population-level changes

Since 2012, the Foundation has been working with public systems and neighborhoods to implement Evidence2Success in Providence,

Rhode Island. Operating in two urban neighborhoods, Evidence2Success in Providence has developed a collaborative action plan for identifying local needs, selecting evidence-based programs and measuring progress. As will be seen below, the initial results have been promising — both in improving outcomes for children and in changing the ways public systems serve them.

In 2015 and early 2016, Casey added three new Evidence2Success communities: Mobile and Selma, Alabama, and Kearns Township in Salt Lake County, Utah. To encourage further replication, the Evidence2Success development team has gathered and produced a wide range of manuals and tools — for example, a web-based fund-mapping application that enables public

systems and community residents to assess the cost effectiveness of child-serving programs. “Our goal has always been to make Evidence2Success as transferable as possible,” says Suzanne Barnard, director of the Casey Foundation’s Evidence-Based Practice Group. “Providence was our early adopter. Their strong partnership has led to improvements in outcomes that give us confidence in this approach.”

This report provides an overview of how Evidence2Success has been implemented in Providence. The experience has provided specific lessons for the Casey Foundation’s Evidence2Success initiative, as well as general insights for funders and communities implementing place-based strategies to improve the lives of vulnerable children and families.



Integrated Prevention

When the Casey Foundation launched Evidence2Success, it aspired to test, develop and scale an integrated prevention model that combined evidence-based programs and involved community leaders to identify youth needs and prescribe appropriate interventions. One such model, already in existence, was Communities That Care (CTC), a system designed to prevent adolescent health and behavior problems. Developed by the Social Development Research Group (SDRG) at the University of Washington, CTC has provided communities with the

city would be a demonstration site for Evidence2Success. A key reason for Casey's interest in Providence was the record of collaboration among elected officials, public agencies and communities in the city to improve services for children and families. From the city's perspective, Evidence2Success was well aligned with its commitment to community partnerships and data-driven accountability. The backbone agency for Evidence2Success is the Providence Children and Youth Cabinet (CYC). A coalition of private organizations and public agencies, CYC works to ensure that all of the city's children — "from cradle to career" — have access to an integrated system of educational, health and other services. "Evidence2Success stretched us as a coalition and as a city," says Rebecca Boxx, director of CYC. "We were very much education-centric, but we have become much more holistic in how we think about well-being for children and youth throughout the city."

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These insights include:

- Data are key to aligning diverse partners.
- A local backbone organization is essential to driving and sustaining the work.
- Champions create buy-in among key local audiences.
- Adaptations are possible, but must be approached with care.
- Leadership changes will happen; be prepared for them.

tools to assess factors hindering or promoting the healthy development of children and to develop a shared vision for achieving better youth outcomes. Although an impressive, rigorously evaluated program, CTC was not designed to include elements that are fundamental to the Foundation's mission: working in urban communities with high needs and influencing the public systems serving children and families.

In the summer of 2012, the Foundation and Providence agreed that the

The Evidence2Success leadership team includes leaders and executives from Family Service of Rhode Island; the Providence Public School District; the Rhode Island Department of Health; the Department of Children, Youth and Families; and the City of Providence. This leadership team is responsible for sustaining the systemwide collaboration essential to Evidence2Success. Equally important are the residents and local service providers who

bring neighborhood-level expertise and community voices to the partnership. “A big part of Evidence2Success is the community voice piece,” says Cynthia Weaver, a senior associate in Casey’s Evidence-Based Practice Group. “It can’t just be the public system telling the community, ‘Here is what’s good for you.’”

Chace Baptista, a member of the Evidence2Success community board in Providence, says that the typical process for serving low-income neighborhoods is to poll residents for their opinions but then ignore those views when designing and implementing programs. In such cases, the residents’ “voice has no meaning,” says Baptista. “And Evidence2Success is in direct contrast to that, which is why I am such a huge fan of it.”

The foundation of Evidence2Success is the combination of good data and collective analysis of that data by public agencies and community leaders from the two participating neighborhoods: South Providence/Elmwood and West End. The citywide Evidence2Success Youth Experience Survey (YES) asked some 6,000 students in sixth, eighth, tenth and twelfth grades about their experiences in five areas: behavior, education, emotional well-being, positive relationships and physical health. “We worked with the school district to make sure that they approved of the survey,” says Casey’s

Barnard. “We took out a question or two, and we added some things to make it more community specific. We certainly wanted the community to be in partnership with us on the administration of the survey.”

The YES data provided critical youth outcomes data and information on risk and protective factors — the underlying conditions that predict children’s well-being. Risk factors, such as family conflict or academic failure, increase the possibility of negative outcomes for children. Protective factors have a positive influence and shield children from risks. Examples include youth reporting opportunities to participate in positive neighborhood activities and parents being involved in their children’s schooling. “The main thing was using student data — students talking about abuse, drinking and very important issues that hinder them from learning,” says Jose Valerio, former principal at the Lillian Feinstein Elementary School in the Elmwood neighborhood. “One of the best things about Evidence2Success was to give the kids voices.”

Inclusion of the youth voice in data collection is a “great example of change,” says Weaver of Casey. “Cities have lots of administrative, ethnographic, demographic data. But data where youth are actually telling us their attitudes, their beliefs, their behaviors — that is a different

kind of data. I think the value of that data is becoming more and more apparent.”

Informed by YES data, the process of setting priorities in pilot neighborhoods included a conscious effort to “level the playing field” between public agencies and the community residents they serve. In small group meetings with neighborhood leaders, the CYC presented the survey data on risk and protective factors, which provided an opportunity for residents to discuss and articulate their priorities. “We had community members looking at data about themselves and then asking, ‘What should we do about this?’” says Baptista. “And by we, I mean the collective we, not we as nonprofit people or we as people who have the right answers, but we as members of the community. What are we going to do about this because we all have a part, and we all are accountable to see positive things happen for kids throughout this city and our neighborhoods. That is a unique value proposition, and Evidence2Success is the only one in my city that does it.”

The data also led to conversations between community residents and the leadership team about disparities in the poorest neighborhoods, where people of color are disproportionately represented and where high levels of risk and low levels of protective factors decrease children’s

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chances of success. “It is important and valuable to hear diverse voices and to understand that with diversity there comes a certain amount of mistrust and conflict that has to be addressed and dealt with,” says Kevin P. Haggerty, director of SDRG, which provides technical assistance to Evidence2Success. “That conflict can be used constructively to move a community forward rather than as a barrier to getting things done.”

Priorities and Programs

Based on the collective analysis of the YES data, system leaders and community residents selected the following priority outcomes for the participating neighborhoods:

- Chronic absenteeism
- Suspension
- Anxiety/depression
- Emotional regulation
- Delinquency

YES data revealed that 32 percent of students in middle school and 50 percent of high school students who took the survey reported being chronically absent — missing 10 percent or more of the school year for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences. The Providence Public School District had already identified high rates of absenteeism as an educational problem. “When chronic absenteeism was one of the top three well-being outcomes chosen by the community board,” says Haggerty, “it took an internal priority for the school system and made it a part of this larger thinking. That was very powerful because it was a part of the long-term strategic plan for the school district, and there was support at the community and the public service levels.”

The YES data also identified community risk factors that increase the likelihood of negative outcomes for children:

- Family management problems that do not provide clear expectations and rules for children’s behavior

- Violent or delinquent behavior starting at an early age
- Neighborhoods characterized by a lack of safety, physical deterioration, high rates of crime and racial insults or attacks
- Low commitment to school — educational success is neither meaningful nor important
- Few opportunities to participate in positive activities and interactions with neighborhood adults

After selecting priority outcomes, Providence began the process of choosing evidence-based programs that addressed them. Evidence-based programs have four essential characteristics:

- A positive effect on child well-being, without any negative effects
- Evaluation quality established by a randomized control trial or two quasi-experimental trials without design flaws
- A clearly defined population with definable risk and protective factors
- Training materials and estimates of required financial and human resources for faithful implementation

The source for identifying these programs was Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development, an online registry supported by Casey that provides information on rigorously evaluated programs that contribute to positive youth development. An Evidence2Success workgroup

studied 44 programs on the Blueprints list, finding a number that addressed the city's five priority youth outcomes. Seeking a balanced portfolio, the workgroup narrowed down the number of potential programs to focus on those that spanned all age groups and included school-, home- and community-based settings for services. The emerging portfolio also aimed to strike a balance among universal programs that all children would get, selective programs for subpopulations identified as being at elevated risk and targeted programs for youth who have already been involved with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

For Providence, one of the most promising programs in the Blueprints database is Positive Action. A universal prevention program implemented in elementary and middle schools, Positive Action promotes an interest in learning, encourages students to cooperate and reduces negative behavior. Providence was particularly interested because the program had been proven effective in addressing three of the city's priority outcomes: chronic absenteeism, suspension and anxiety/depression. "We have standards and the curriculum for academics, but we don't have any kind of standards or curriculum for the social-emotional needs of students," says Winnie Van

Horne-Prior, literacy instructional coach at the Alan Shawn Feinstein Elementary School. "Huge populations of our students have experienced trauma, which directly affects them academically and in their social interactions with their peers. Positive Action gives teachers a curriculum to help these kids."

In addition to Positive Action, system leaders and neighborhood residents agreed on five other programs:

- Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS), a school-based program to reduce symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder among children and





rate of chronic absenteeism has increased by 5 percent. The initial cohort of children who completed CBITS collectively experienced less stress, with an average reduction of 35 percent in key traumatic stress indicators. Evidence2Success is not only improving child outcomes in selected neighborhoods but also influencing the public systems serving children. In 2015, the CYC received a Health Equity Zone grant from the Rhode Island Department of Health, which will help scale evidence-based programs in the pilot neighborhoods. The four-year grant has the potential to bring more than \$1 million in funding to these efforts.



emotional regulation. The program is implemented by teachers and also includes parent groups.

- Multisystemic Therapy (MST), an intensive family- and community-based treatment that addresses the multiple causes of serious antisocial behavior in juvenile offenders.
- Nurse-Family Partnership, a home-visiting program that matches first-time mothers with registered nurses.

improve functioning, attendance and grades.

- Familias Unidas, a culturally sensitive parent-education program for adult Latino caregivers.
- Incredible Years, a program for preschool and elementary school youth who are showing early signs of antisocial behavior and low

All six programs are up and running, and the early results to date are promising. In the schools offering Positive Action, chronic absenteeism has dropped by 5 percent. In the rest of the school system, the

To ensure proper fidelity in evidence-based programming, Providence has established program-specific implementation teams. Although adhering to the specific model of each evidence-based program is critical to achieving the desired results, Providence has carefully made a few small changes. For example, one group of children in CBITS found the prescribed group discussion of trauma experience difficult. This led attendance to drop. Working with the CBITS developers, the Providence implementation team modified the program, with the facilitators leading a hypothetical discussion about an adolescent affected by trauma. Feeling more secure, the middle school students actively participated in the discussion and returned for future

sessions. “The deviation from what happens in a research control trial for an evidence-based program and what happens in the field is critical,” says Matt Billings, project manager at CYC. “The changes made, with the support of clinicians and trained folks, do not deviate too far from that rigor and fidelity monitoring. Part of this story is professionals making really smart decisions about what works for the youth right in front of them.”

Smart Financing

A fundamental goal of Evidence2Success is helping communities get better outcomes from their investments on behalf of children and families. One challenge to more cost-effective services is that public funding is disproportionately committed to narrowly targeted problems and to ineffective, high-cost interventions — for example, residential placements in the child welfare system and confinement in juvenile detention facilities. Evidence2Success seeks to demonstrate that public systems can reallocate a small percentage of what they have been spending, perhaps on remedial services that have failed to make progress, to proven prevention programs. “We know it is not practical or feasible to make wholesale shifts in how public dollars are spent,” says Margaret Flynn-Khan, a founding

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partner of Mainspring Consulting, which provides financing technical assistance to Evidence2Success. “But if communities can focus on redirecting even 1 to 2 percent of dollars, they could make a big difference in terms of child well-being.”

The categorical funding of children’s services in Rhode Island and other states restricts the ability of public agencies to “pool” their resources for integrated preventive services. These agencies can, however, “braid” individual funding streams to achieve a similar result. For example, in Providence, system leaders have redeployed dollars from their own budgets to fund implementation of evidence-based programs aligned with their core missions. The Providence Public School District supported training and implementation of Positive Action in schools in the pilot neighborhoods, and the Rhode Island Department of Health provided support for Incredible Years. “We would love to move toward pooled funding if that were possible,” says Jessie Watrous, former senior

associate at the Casey Foundation. “With braided funding, authority rests with the agencies, and it probably always will.”

Central to the financing strategy of Evidence2Success is the mapping of a community’s current investments in children’s services to identify funds that could be realigned toward prevention services. The fund-mapping process pulls together data on existing expenditures of partner agencies to help align resources with priority outcomes. (In addition to dollars, agency resources can include staffing and in-kind support.) “Having the fund-mapping data was very important for the communities,” says Haggerty of SDRG. “The data identified the distribution of cost and investment in communities and showed how they might leverage money to move upstream and implement programs at an earlier point in time.”

Because so much funding is already allocated to public systems, the redirection of those dollars is the core financing strategy in

Evidence2Success. Other financing strategies include identifying federal discretionary funds, state and local allocations and private and public grants. In September 2016, the CYC was awarded a five-year, \$1.8 million grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration for the Building Trauma Sensitive Schools (BTSS) initiative. An expansion of the Evidence2Success framework in Providence, BTSS will seek to decrease post-traumatic stress disorder among middle-school students in neighborhoods with elevated levels of trauma. By the end of the grant period, the initiative will have served more than 3,000 adolescents.

The financing work is “challenging,” says the CYC’s Boxx. “Procurement, contracting and dollar flow for the programs — even when there’s a great deal of good will among participants — are hard.” But with trends in children’s services shifting incrementally toward proven programs and cross-sector partnerships, Boxx and her colleagues in Providence have shown that the city is well positioned to compete for public and private funds to sustain and scale up Evidence2Success.

Lessons Learned

Evidence2Success has been a learning experience for the site in Providence and the Casey Foundation. The work in Providence has reaffirmed many lessons for place-based

strategies engaging both public systems and community residents that may interest funders, communities and others working on similar initiatives to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families:

- **Data are key to aligning diverse partners.** Reliable data played a crucial role in virtually every aspect of Evidence2Success — assessing needs, defining priorities, selecting programs, monitoring implementation, mapping funds and measuring progress. Moreover, providing data to communities can ensure that everyone involved has the same information to help make decisions.
- **A local backbone organization is essential to driving and sustaining the work.** Characteristics of such an organization include local respect, independence from politics, adequate resources, committed staff and a mission that embraces collaborative processes of community change.
- **Champions create buy-in among key local audiences.** Among the participating public system leaders, the principals and teachers in schools and the residents and service providers in neighborhoods, influential messengers championed one or more elements of Evidence2Success. For example, the Providence teachers who first implemented Positive Action “owned it” and found ways to build the program’s lessons into existing instruction time.
- **Adaptations are possible, but must be approached with care.** Even among evidence-based programs, one size does not fit all. With care and consultation with experts, implementers can maintain program fidelity, make local adaptations and achieve results.
- **Leadership changes will happen; be prepared for them.** In a multi-year site-based initiative, changes in political and system leadership are inevitable. System and community stakeholders must be prepared to educate new leaders on the value of the Evidence2Success framework.

Evidence2Success has also produced specific philanthropic lessons for Casey. Based on its experience in Providence, the Foundation made four modifications to the expansion of the Evidence2Success framework.

- **Funding.** Casey funding to Providence was flexible, allowing the city to spend it on staff and infrastructure. But when it came time to choose programs, there was a delay because financing for them needed to be secured. In the new Evidence2Success communities, Casey dollars are earmarked specifically for programs, and sites must match this contribution dollar for dollar. Among the advantages of this approach: Local partner agencies put “skin in the game” at an early stage by providing staffing resources, and the advance commitment to funding evidence-based programs motivates communities

to complete the Youth Experience Survey more quickly.

- **Staffing.** The Foundation initially recommended the appointment of a site coordinator and allowed key duties to be distributed among the partners. Experience has shown Evidence2Success requires a full-time local site coordinator. The Foundation also recommends, but does not require, that sites have a finance lead.
- **Financing toolkit.** The initial financing toolkit focused on finding flexible funding for Evidence2Success. The Foundation has expanded that toolkit to explicitly identify funding for programs, infrastructure and scale.
- **Technical assistance.** The Foundation initially supplied open-ended technical assistance to Providence. To make Evidence2Success more transferable and amenable to scaling, structured, cost-effective technical assistance and coaching has been developed. The Foundation now emphasizes web-based technical assistance — for example, training curricula for coordinators, fund-mapping tools and materials to help communities and public systems collectively sort out priorities for programs.

The Casey Foundation is committed to expanding Evidence2Success, along with the tools and technical assistance that help sites succeed through budget cycles and changes in political and system leadership.

Evidence2Success sites have access to online training tools and in-person resources designed to help community partners through every step of the framework — from establishing a leadership committee and community board, to selecting priority outcomes for children, to choosing a balanced portfolio of evidence-based programs, to developing financing strategies and monitoring progress toward population-level change.

“We would like to have more Evidence2Success sites up and running — and achieving results that we can document by regular administration of the Youth Experience Survey,” says Casey’s Barnard. “We are also creating learning opportunities to introduce key tools to other communities that want to launch their own efforts to collect survey data, deploy financing strategies and identify evidence-based programs for their children’s needs.”

As for Providence, Evidence2Success is beginning a new cycle. The Providence Public School District administered the Youth Experience Survey again and will release a second wave of data. The implementation of the six evidence-based programs continues as does the work to secure public and private financing to scale up the programs. In addition to the program and finance work, Evidence2Success will focus on increasing the range of committed stakeholders, sustaining the program implementation teams, advancing a workforce development strategy and empowering residents to continue

to take ownership of the community data and share results with their neighborhoods.

“I see parents more involved in their children’s learning,” says V. Raffini, a storyteller, educator and lifelong resident of Providence. “I see more sense of community, neighborhood. I see a bigger, better picture.”

Key Accomplishments

CROSS-SYSTEM LEADERSHIP TEAM FORMED:

Executives from Rhode Island Departments of Health and Children, Youth and Families, and Providence Public School District join city and nonprofit leaders

JOINT PRIORITIES SET:

Residents, system leaders and other partners agree on shared outcomes based on the Youth Experience Survey data

FINANCES COMMITTED:

Ratification of finance plan, including initial funding from public systems. Current leveraged resources for 2017 = \$1.2 million

2012

2013

2014

COMMUNITIES ENGAGED:

Two neighborhoods agree to pilot initiative; resident tables form that continue to actively support Evidence2Success

EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS CHOSEN:

Six evidence-based programs are selected; currently, all six are being implemented

LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS OCCURRED:

Despite leadership changes in many state and local systems, Evidence2Success is being sustained and expanded

Success Providence

FUNDING INCREASED AND DIVERSIFIED:

Additional funding from Rhode Island Health Equity Zone grant, a federal block grant and the City of Providence expands programming

YOUTH WELL-BEING IMPROVED:

Early results include reduced symptoms of trauma and increased self-management

SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE SOLIDIFIED:

The Children and Youth Cabinet (CYC) centers its three-year strategic plan on the Evidence2Success framework



THOUSANDS SERVED:

First year of evidence-based programming serves more than 4,200 children and youth

YOUTH EXPERIENCE SURVEY READMINISTERED:

Local investment supports second district administration

FRAMEWORK EXPANDED:

CYC receives a five-year \$1.8 million federal grant to increase the number of adolescents served by Building Trauma Sensitive Schools

providence was our early adopter

▲ SUZANNE BARNARD



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