

CARING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION.

Caring for Denver Foundation's [Youth](#) funding is focused on youth-informed and youth-led mental health, trauma, and/or substance misuse supports, which increase youth's (ages 0-26) ability to manage life stresses and pressures. It also provides support for families and allies of youth to better support youth in their healing.

This brief summarizes the impact Caring for Denver's Youth grantees made from April 2022 to March 2023, including:

- ✓ Increasing youth awareness and engagement in seeking help.
- ✓ Creating ways more staff can be part of effective mental health support systems.
- ✓ Decreasing youth stigma around acknowledging, discussing, and engaging in mental health supports.
- ✓ Providing longer-term, more comprehensive support for mental health and substance misuse.

It also includes grantee insights on what's working to improve mental health and substance misuse outcomes.

Learn more about our impact goals and community-defined approach by viewing our [Shared Impact Plan](#).



28,429

unduplicated individuals impacted through Youth funding



Our kids don't just need objective safety, they need to feel safe. They need to be able to really connect emotionally with people, and for their brain to hear messages that there's no threat, there's no harm being caused, and someone will be there for them.

*- Lutheran Family Services
Rocky Mountains*

YOUTH GRANTEE IMPACT

Below are the primary ways grantees have reached youth and allies. Individuals often participate in more than one type of support.

20,594
individuals
reached with
behavioral
health messaging



9,009

received clinical treatment, navigation, or case management interventions

5,761

engaged in creative and culturally-based community wellness programs

1,171

care providers engaged in training and supports

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Each grantee focuses on up to three *Signals of Progress* within the [Shared Impact Plan](#), to track and report on each year. This data combined with the stories that follow represent the primary ways grantees have made a difference through their Caring for Denver grant.



INCLUSIVE ACCESS

Care that resonates, in places that feel comfortable, at times that work.

7,513

youth and allies reported increased engagement, skills, or resilience to address substance misuse and mental health issues



ATTENTION TO FIT

Understood, connected, and respected by those providing care.

1,255

youth and allies reported increased trust, reduced stigma, utilized services for the first time, or felt more supported as care providers addressing behavioral health



CARE OVER TIME

Consistent, flexible care options throughout the healing journey.

350

youth and allies reported to benefit from more crisis care options and better coordination of services for more stability in community

We ensure all our offerings are welcoming and safe for youth so they know they can be their authentic selves. Providing mental health therapy here is just a natural continuation of that.

- Colorado Dream Foundation



COMMUNITY TRENDS REPORTED BY GRANTEES

Youth are proactively seeking help.

More youth are aware of their mental wellness and are better at seeking specific support to self-regulate and meet their emotional needs. Older youth are increasing the length of stay in programs and requests to extend program participation beyond established timelines.

More staff across roles are part of mental health support for youth.

Organizations are building cultures that support staff in developing their awareness and skills to support youth better. More youth-serving adults, even those outside of the organization's mental health programming, are engaged in supporting youth wellbeing.



Youth are helping build this organization through building themselves.

– Homies Unidos Denver

WHAT'S WORKING: HOW GRANTEES ARE CONTRIBUTING TO TRENDS

- **Prioritizing youth in program planning and leadership.** According to grantees, youth are more responsive and engaged when given authentic opportunities to be seen as the experts of their experience. Programs flexible to youth needs while having consistent values and expectations further build safe and trusting relationships.
- **Providing more entry points so youth can engage through different activities and interests.** Once engaged, support can be layered around the youth for more intensive behavioral health help over time.
- **Creatively building or shifting internal systems** to identify and respond to youth needs more quickly. These innovations allow youth, staff, and caregivers to get help when needed more effectively.
- **Providing staff training efforts that lead to shared language across organizations** to address youth needs better. Shared language about mental health and wellness leads to better staff collaboration and more consistent support for youth.



Commún’s youth mental health program emphasizes youth leadership in program design, extensive training for all their staff, and multiple entry points to care.

“Youth are sharing that just having a space where they feel comfortable and a sense of belonging helped them increase their confidence in their ability to support themselves and others.”



Commún staff and youth co-design programming, building youths’ skills and leadership, ensuring the program feels relevant, and encouraging peer-driven connections.

Staff are also committed to training, learning, and practicing mental health skills. They believe it helps them respond more confidently to youth mental health conversations when those topics naturally arise.

Additionally, Commún found that working with youth and their families to address immediate needs through programs, case management, training, peer groups, and more have been essential entry points that often lead to participation in mental health conversations and activities.

Florence Crittenton Services expanded access to therapeutic support for Latinx teens who are new parents by creating a therapist role that is integrated into campus life.



“We have her here daily, ready to have the conversation immediately versus ‘You have to wait until Tuesday when the therapist arrives.’ Plus, she can do acute needs and a warm handoff to another therapist - so there are many options for support.”

The therapist bridges students’ immediate needs, long-term therapy supports, and wrap-around services provided by the non-profit.

This provider offers students “check-ins,” reducing the stigma of “therapy.” They can also connect with her on-demand during the day.

She participates in regular campus activities so students can build trust with her throughout the week.

Additionally, as a member of the team, she provides insights and support to school and non-profit staff so they can more holistically address student needs.



COMMUNITY TRENDS REPORTED BY GRANTEES

There is less stigma for youth around acknowledging, discussing, and engaging in mental health support.

Many programs have successfully created safe spaces where youth can express their struggles and ask for help.

Grantees also reported more youth hearing about mental wellness concepts in their day-to-day life and using the trusted spaces the programs provide to ask questions and explore them further.

This program is providing youth an opportunity to express themselves and their emotions without having to engage in one-on-one therapy with full-blown clinical assessments. This helps foster safety and engagement in longer-term, more profound mental health services.

– Urban Peak



WHAT'S WORKING: HOW GRANTEES ARE CONTRIBUTING TO TRENDS

- **Providing safe and consistent spaces where youth can normalize wellness conversations and practice positive life choices.** These experiences are helping youth build trust and regularly connect with adults and other peers in healthy ways and have been essential to reducing stigma.
- **Hiring providers and staff who match youth backgrounds, identities, and cultures.** While intentional hiring takes time, grantees are successfully filling these roles. Youth relate more easily to these providers, often bringing peers or family into care due to these trusted connections.
- **Implementing models that encourage youth and caregivers to connect with help in informal and relational ways.** These models focus on trust and comfort as a priority of services and on being available at the moment rather than at structured, limited times.
- **Investing in staff wellness.** In addition to supporting staff retention, grantees report they can better model healthy behaviors and more consistently reinforce social and emotional learning values with youth.



Colorado Postpartum Support International (CO-PSI) is seeing success by offering a therapeutic connection for new mothers that is intentionally relational.

“Two weeks waiting for care feels like an eternity when you’re suffering. Getting moms to a place of ‘I feel like I can keep going’ through this first call is a win.”



Their pilot program, *Birth Squad Denver*, is designed to connect birthers of color to culturally relevant support groups, including therapeutic providers and peers.

When individuals contact Birth Squad Denver, they first receive a welcome call from either a peer or a provider with shared lived experience.

While many of the birthers are engaging with the support groups, the program found the phone call was an essential brief intervention. This connection is critical as BIPOC birthers experience higher post-partum mood disorder rates and are less likely to use conventional crisis services.

Struggle of Love has successfully established The Love Center as a safe and consistent place for Montbello youth and their families to receive many types of care, including therapeutic supports.



“Because it’s ongoing, they know they can come here, and there’s going to be an adult here where they feel safe, and they can be vulnerable, and they can talk about those things.”

For many years Struggle of Love has offered accessible hours, an open-door policy, and a variety of wellness programming, creating a sense of belonging and security for Montbello youth. With Caring for Denver funding, they added in-house clinical therapy with culturally matched therapists and counselors to support youth with mental health needs in real-time.

Spots have been filled from the beginning, and they have recently increased staff hours to meet the service demand.

These staff have also started a [podcast](#) to talk openly and informally about mental health and wellness topics as a way to break down stigma and normalize mental health. The podcasts are released twice a month, and viewership continues to grow.



COMMUNITY TRENDS REPORTED BY GRANTEES

Youth are receiving longer-term and more comprehensive support for mental health and substance misuse.

Grantees are reporting improvements in their ability to coordinate care for youth more effectively over extended periods,

and through more life and care transitions. The ability to make this shift was linked to improvements in *Inclusive Access* and *Attention to Fit* across programs in the care system.



Often, they are working with the most symptomatic child. Then, as they get to know the family, they realize the need for this therapeutic model among family members who also have trauma symptoms. By providing services attuned to a family system, families feel heard.

– Savio

WHAT'S WORKING: HOW GRANTEES ARE CONTRIBUTING TO TRENDS

- **Creating “bridge roles” to support youth and families during care transitions.** The person in this role often provides direct contact with a care provider, social worker, or navigator. This helps build relationships and supports youth to stay engaged even when the care system can't address their needs immediately.
- **Extending programs to allow youth to participate longer and in different ways for continual engagement in positive supports.** Increased funding in community-based youth programs has created more opportunities for grantees to meet youth needs, and they are expanding what they offer through partnerships and referrals.
- **Working across the family context, at home or in schools.** By meeting youth where they are, grantees provide better, more successful care coordination and encourage more family involvement in therapeutic work.
- **Implementing cross-team training and approaches to help staff identify, understand, and more holistically address youth behaviors and needs.** With clinical and non-clinical staff regularly at the same table, grantees feel they can more quickly implement and better adapt interventions as behaviors or needs change.



The Denver Health School-Based Health Centers (SBHC) project successfully integrated a bridge role into their care system within schools.

“This role starts with trust and safety, and then when ready she can walk them down the hall and give them a safe introduction to the therapist.”



Working closely with the primary care providers, a new social work care coordinator position introduces incoming students to the services available at the SBHC, including mental health support. Youth are screened for mental health concerns and identify areas of strength and resilience on which to build. The social worker provides informal check-ins over time, connecting students to appropriate resources within the school. They focus on supporting

the youth’s culture, agency, aspirations, and relationships to increase their mental well-being, which can prevent the development of mental illness. Additionally, when mental health needs require therapeutic intervention, students are more open to it because of their relationship and trust with the social worker.

Denver Rescue Mission has seen great success with their mental health providers being part of trainings and services across many departments at the residences.



“This grant really launched Denver Rescue Mission into a more clinically supportive facility because we had enough mental health staff to show our work and impact.”

The Bridge Program works with individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and has expanded their behavioral health capacity by hiring multiple youth and family counselors to focus on youth behavioral health needs. The hired counselors have contributed their time and expertise within the

organization to also play a lead role in program oversight, become part of the de-escalation training team, and support behavioral health intervention needs for the organization.

Including the behavioral health specialists in these ways is helping Denver Rescue Mission prioritize and integrate a behavioral health approach to its work across the organization.



Caring for Denver Foundation is filled with gratitude for the partnership of our youth grantees. It is an honor to learn alongside you and champion your efforts to transform mental health and substance misuse care in Denver. Thank you for your honesty, wisdom, and leadership.



Thank you to the grantees who provided the data for this brief through their 2023 annual reporting.

Adoption Options
Apprentice of Peace Youth Organization
Art from Ashes, Inc.
AUL Denver
Centus Counseling, Consulting &
Education
Children's Hospital Colorado Foundation
Clayton Early Learning
Colorado Circles for Change
Colorado Dream Foundation
Colorado Postpartum Support International
Commún
Creative Strategies for Change
Denver Center for 21st Century Learning
(DC21)
Denver Children's Home
Denver Collaborative Partnership -
FamilyStrong
Denver Health Foundation
Denver Public Schools - Student Equity and
Opportunity
Denver Rescue Mission
Developmental FX
Dream Center Denver
Elephant Circle
Family Star
Florence Crittenton Services

From the Heart Enterprises
Fully Liberated Youth
Generation Schools Network
GALS Denver
Girls Inc. of Metro Denver
Greater Denver CARES Mentoring
Movement
Heart & Hand Center
Homies Unidos Denver
Jewish Family Service of Colorado
Joy as Resistance
Judi's House/JAG Institute
The Kaleidoscope Project
Khesed
Launch Network
Lincoln Hills Cares
Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains
Make A Chess Move
Mile High 360
Mile High United Way
Movement 5280
Muslim Youth for Positive Impact
PlatteForum
Project Helping
Project PAVE Inc.
Project VOYCE
Queer Asterisk

Raise the Future
Rise Above Colorado
Riseup Community School
The ROCK Center
Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy
Network
Rocky Mountain Prep/STRIVE Prep
Sacred Voices
Saint Joseph Hospital Foundation
The Shaka Franklin Foundation for Youth
Savio
Second Wind Fund, Inc.
Seeking Common Ground
The Spring Institute
Star Girlz Empowerment Inc.

Struggle of Love Foundation
Sun Valley Youth Center
Tennyson Center for Children
Thriving Families
University of Colorado Anschutz, Center
for Public Health Practice
Urban Peak
Vuela for Health
Warren Village
WellPower
Women's Wilderness
Words to Power
Youth Employment Academy
Youth On Record

**caring
for Denver**
FOUNDATION



@caring4denver

Founded and funded by Denver, Caring for Denver's mission is to address Denver's mental health and substance misuse needs by growing community-informed solutions, dismantling stigma, and turning the community's desire to help into action.

www.Caring4Denver.org