

Overview

In April 2021, we funded 51 organizations working with young people ages 0-26 to provide innovative mental health, trauma, and substance misuse supports. These supports are intended to increase youth's resilience to life stresses and pressures, address mental health and substance misuse early, and provide supports for families and allies of youth to better support youth in their healing. The information below is a summary of insights collected from these organizations as part of their mid-year learning conversations with us.

HOW GRANTEES ARE MEETING THE MOMENT

Grantees were acutely aware of heightened mental health and substance use needs among Denver's youth as COVID impacts the community. Grantees have continued to provide services and supports, adapting often to meet the increased needs of youth due to isolation and stress. Based on our learning conversations, **grantees pointed consistently to three key ways they are meeting the needs of youth and overcoming the barriers COVID has placed on their programming.**



Everybody works together to address the kids' needs... It's rarely just talk therapy because we're meeting them where they are.

-Project PAVE

Caring For Denver Foundation is committed to learning both as a measure of progress and to guide our future actions. Deeply listening to our grantees and their expertise is part of this commitment.

Learning Briefs share back what we are learning and how grantees are helping us think about our work differently.

We are thankful to Youth grantees for their passion and honesty in helping lift up these important points of reflection.



#1 TRUST, CONSISTENCY, FLEXIBILITY

Grantees told us **building trust with youth is one of the most essential aspects to successful interventions.** Many stressed that they built trust with youth by providing a safe space and reliable, supportive relationships with adults. Grantees also talked about building trust through supporting youth ownership for program activities and adaptations. Generating a sense of ownership heightens trust and increases youth engagement.

Flexibility was also important, both in how programs were delivered and for addressing youth's needs in the moment. While virtual activities were an important tool for staying connected during the initial phases of the pandemic, most grantees told us their virtual activities were less successful than in-person. Many youths did not have sufficient access to reliable technology or space to participate in programming. When youth were able to attend online, they engaged less, and it was difficult to know what resonated with them. For many, **returning to in-person programming was essential. Grantees recognize that the youth also want to be in spaces together.**



We take the time to build trust with these youth. That alone is a process... We invest in them to get them to open up and talk to us, then we can learn more about how to support them.

- HEAL Denver Collaborative



#2 INTEGRATE AND COLLABORATE

To address new and expanded behavioral health needs caused by the pandemic, grantees emphasized the benefits of having staff able to address mental health needs incorporated into places youth already are. For some, this meant locating licensed therapeutic staff in schools or program buildings. Others ensured trained staff were available to address mental health needs as part of program activities. **Having trained adults incorporated into programming allows for needs to be met in the moment, which reduces wait times and silos of care.**

The integration also contributes to trust because these trained staff and care providers are already familiar to the youth and are operating in a known safe space. Incorporating therapeutic services into existing programming also facilitates the use of alternative therapy approaches, which grantees feel youth are more likely to use. For some grantees this comes in the form of equine therapy, social-emotional learning conversations in the classroom, or art therapy including poetry, podcasts, theatre, and music.



*" Being able to offer services that are not just sit and talk therapy, because most of them reject that... being able to offer it in a way that is therapeutic, but not really saying you are in therapy."
- Star GIRLZ Empowerment*

#2 INTEGRATE AND COLLABORATE

CONTINUED



When kids need support, they need support in that moment. They may not need support three weeks from now, in a building outside of their school when they have an appointment to see a therapist. If we can reach them in the moment they have the need and support them through whatever is happening, we can get them back into their academic setting rather than having them spiraling out and leaving for the rest of the day.

- Girls Athletic Leadership Schools Denver

Grantees also discussed **collaborations as a necessary response to the new and increased need for therapeutic services**. More agencies are looking for places to refer youth, so community-based programs are seeing increased interest in their services. For some this created a need to quickly build referral systems after developing enhanced screening or increasing capacity in their programs. Grantees also recognize the critical role schools play in youth health and see successful collaboration with them as an essential way to address mental health and substance misuse needs. While schools have limited or restricted volunteers due to COVID, several grantees prioritized building and maintaining strong relationships to work within them in the coming years. Grantees noted that schools, and the people who staff them, are still struggling with the weight the pandemic has put on them, and many haven't had the capacity to re-engage with outside programming.

While focusing on integration and collaboration has many benefits (like reduced care silos and wait times as well as increased comfort and trust with care), **workforce capacity remains a critical barrier for many grantees**. Challenges include limited candidates meeting job qualifications, increased pay expectations, and effectively preparing candidates for what to expect in high-intensity work. Some grantees also emphasized the additional time it takes to hire someone with a strong relationship to the community and culture, recognizing that provider fit is essential. Notably, several grantees mentioned an increase in requests for therapists of color among their participants. There were additional disruptions to partnerships caused by staff turnover. To overcome these ongoing barriers, grantees emphasized the importance of having the flexibility to be creative and adapt the work to manage staffing shortages.



#3

EXPAND HEALTHY CONNECTIONS AND RESOURCES

Building trust and connection with the parents and caregivers of youth participants is an essential element of many grantees' success with youth. Some grantees purposely include activities for parents and caregivers to participate with youth. Others expanded their outreach and connection points with caregivers as a part of their program. For many grantees, engaging caregivers is one way to improve retention of youth in the program. They also note that parents and caregivers who themselves learn and apply program skills are a critical asset for expanding youths' opportunities for social and emotional development.


Beyond caregiver engagement, many grantees emphasized the growing intensity and diversity of youth's needs right now. Because these organizations and staff are trusted, the support they provide to youth has needed to extend beyond what their program typically offers. Many grantees are working to be responsive to other critical issues the youth are experiencing like hunger, school stress, and added responsibilities at home. Beyond needing additional sources of funding or referral options to help address these needs, grantees also talked about needing resources for staff self-care during this time so that they can continue to be healthy and fully support the needs of the youth they are serving.

" We knew parental involvement was extremely important and that working with newcomer communities would pose extra barriers in communication. But even after we accounted for this in our plan, we were surprised by the depth to which we needed to reach out to parents... We have increased the number of hours that we pay for someone to call caregivers and parents every week to ask them what is going on and how are they doing. "

- Women's Wilderness

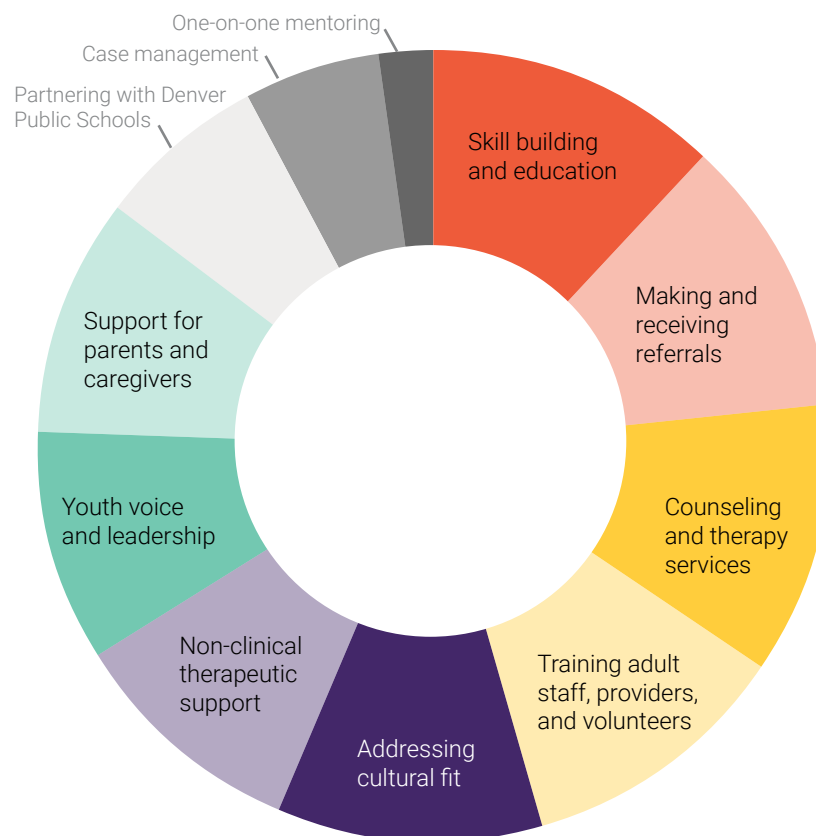





 Having space for kids to go throughout the entire pandemic has been extremely healing. A space for them to be able to let out all of the tension and have good ways to express themselves... That's something that makes the Center unique. We are so focused on mental and emotional health. It's just always at our core.

-Sun Valley Youth Center

EXAMPLES OF FUNDED ACTIVITIES
 AMONG YOUTH 2021 GRANTEES



Skill building and education through workshops and curriculum delivery to address social and emotional development with youth
Making and receiving referrals to non-clinical and clinical therapeutic supports
Counseling and therapy services with clinical providers, including individual or group sessions
Training adult staff, providers, and volunteers in trauma-informed youth development and mental health supports
Addressing cultural fit of services and providers and emphasizing youth's culture as a tool for healing
Non-clinical therapeutic support such as art, movement, poetry, and equine-therapy
Youth voice and leadership incorporated into program design and adaptations, including peer-based support
Support for parents and caregivers with skill building, education, and their own therapeutic needs
Partnering with Denver Public Schools to deliver programming in classrooms or after-school
Case management and resource navigation to increase youth's stability and/or academic and program engagement
One-on-one mentoring activities to address resiliency

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT WHERE WE GO FROM HERE?

These learnings echo what we've heard from the broader community: Denver needs mental health and substance misuse care with inclusive access, attention to fit, and a continuum of care over time. For our youth funding area, this means Caring for Denver will continue to partner with grantees to provide:

- 1 Inclusive Access** through interventions that promote spaces for youth to come together in healthy, safe, and healing environments. We will also continue to support interventions that build the skills of adult allies to address mental health and substance misuse needs in these environments.
- 2 Attention to Fit** by supporting realistic grantee timelines for hiring that prioritizes fit of providers to the population being served and recognizes the need for programs to have time and space to build trusting relationships between youth and adults.
- 3 Care Over Time** by supporting co-location of services in places youth already have connections and feel safe. We will also continue supporting grants that emphasize strong collaborations and referral systems to support growing demand and changing needs for youth.

“Longevity is key. We needed time to hire the right person that’s a good fit for the community and for the population we’re serving. Having a grant that lasts three years will be incredibly impactful for us to see change and growth.”

- Denver Rescue Mission

We also heard from grantees that the work is complex because humans are complex, the work is not linear, and it takes time before seeing impact. Consistent with past findings from other funding areas, grantees emphasized the importance of the honest and learning-focused relationship with us, multi-year funding opportunities, and our acknowledgement that not all organizations are the same and thus need space for flexibility as critical to their grant’s success.

GRANTEE MATRIX

Grantees expressed a desire to connect with others who are working on addressing the same areas. This matrix is one way we hope to support this desire. Grantee names are listed at right, linked to organizational websites. We've used shading below to highlight some common activities grantees are implementing. Please reach out to us if you would like help making a connection.


	Adoption Options	Apprentice of Peace Youth Organization	Art from Ashes	Boys & Girls Clubs Metro Denver	Casa Milagro Youth Solutions Inc	Centus Counseling, Consulting & Education	Children's Hospital Colorado Foundation	Clayton Early Learning	Común	Creative Strategies for Change	Denver Children's Home	Denver Health Foundation	Denver Rescue Mission	Denver's Early Childhood Council	Developmental FX	Dream Center Denver	From the Heart Enterprises	Girls Athletic Leadership Schools Denver	Girls Inc. of Metro Denver	HEAL Denver Collaborative (Lincoln Hills Cares)	Jewish Family Service of Colorado	Jud's House/JAG Institute	Khesed	Launch Network	Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains	Make A Chess Move
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GRANTEE MATRIX CONTINUED

	Mental Health Center of Denver	Mile High 360	Muslim Youth for Positive Impact	Project PAVE	Project VOYCE	Queer Asterisk	Rise Above Colorado	Riseup Community School	Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network	Saint Joseph Hospital Foundation	Second Wind Fund	Star Girlz Empowerment	STRIVE Prep	Struggle of Love Foundation	Sun Valley Youth Center	Tennyson Center for Children	The ROCK Center	The Spring Institute	Thriving Families	Urban Peak	Vuela for Health	Warren Village	Women's Wilderness	Words To Power	Youth On Record
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