

SECTION E: PROGRAM PLAN FOR FY 2023-2024, continued

INNOVATION (INN)

PROJECT NUMBER/NAME: ___ Extracurricular\Enrichment activities funding ___

CONTINUED FROM PRIOR YEAR PLAN OR UPDATE

NEW

- A. Expected start and end dates of this INN Project: ___ Date of funding ___
- B. The total time frame (duration) of this INN Project: June 30th 2024, with possibility of extension if pilot is successful

1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

A. Primary Problem

Provide a narrative summary of the challenge or problem identified and why it is important to solve for the community. Describe what led to the development of the idea for this INN Project and the reasons this project has been prioritized over alternative challenges identified during the Community Program Planning Process.

- California Youth Connection, a youth-led organization, develops leaders who empower each other and their communities to transform the foster care system through legislative, policy, and practice change. Our vision is that all foster youth will be equal partners in contributing to all policies and decisions made in their lives and that all youth in foster care will have their needs met and the support to grow into healthy and vibrant adults. CYC is composed of youth between the ages of 14-24 who have at one point in their lives experienced foster care or involvement in the juvenile justice community. **For over 35 years, CYC members have advocated for and achieved significant systemic changes.**
- **CYC members have always advocated for foster youth to have more access to enrichment activities.** Navigating the foster care system is inherently traumatic. Foster youth experience homelessness, substance use disorders, mental health issues, parenting at young ages, involvement in the criminal justice system, and surviving domestic and sexual violence at much higher rates than youth that grow up in traditional family settings. Foster youth deserve to have opportunities to heal. Foster youth deserve to experience normalcy. Enrichment activities support healing for foster youth by supporting their health and wellness, motivating them to stay engaged in their education, helping them to experience stability, and giving them an opportunity to build lifelong skills and develop lifelong connections with their peers, their families, and their communities. All of this leads to better outcomes for our youth and for our communities.
- **Currently, California law requires that youth in foster care have regular opportunities to participate in extracurricular and enrichment activities, but there is no accountability for this obligation and no annual funding investment attached, and therefore no guarantees to ensure that youth and their caregivers are able to actually participate in these activities.** For youth in the juvenile justice system, the State has no obligation to provide opportunities for extracurriculars, despite the fact that this critical intervention is similarly necessary and beneficial.
- State law has eliminated some barriers to participation by allowing caregivers to consent to participation. **However, the law did *not* address the significant barrier of cost.** While all families are encouraged to leverage free and low-cost activities, the majority of enrichment activities have a

financial cost, which can include enrollment and participation fees, equipment, uniforms, and transportation, among others. Despite the importance of enrichment participation, current foster care payment rates do not account for the cost of these activities. Nor is there any statewide program providing recurring financial support for extracurriculars for youth in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems.

- There are multiple barriers that hinder the participation of youth in these programs. Transportation is a barrier, as many of these activities are held multiple times a week. Studies show that youth are more successful when they can engage and participate in enrichment activities. Providing this funding would allow youth to have better access to outside-of-the-home activities. In addition to social interaction with the opportunity for lifelong connections to be built. Studies show that engagement in safe and healthy social interactions diminishes the desire to engage in recreational substance use. Lifelong advantages to belonging to a team and ongoing relationships with coaches and teammates provide youth with a sense of understanding and belonging.
- Local members of the Shasta Chapter of CYC met with Miguel Rodriguez Mental Health, Behavioral Health and Social Services branch Director, Pamela Ottinger Program Manager of Childrens Services, and Cindy Lane Deputy Director of Childrens Services. During this meeting the youth provided testimony to the limitations of available access to extracurricular/ enrichment activities and some of the hurdles in place surrounding participation in these engagements. They described the importance of the engagement in these activities to promote positive mental health for both individual and group settings. Youth have expressed the value of enrichment/extracurricular activities supporting ongoing mental health wellness for foster youth. Agency representatives met with the youth and listened to the concerns expressed driving the planning process for this project. This project plan has been prioritized over other presented ideas as this presentation was driven by the concerns and lived experiences of youth who have experienced foster care.

B. Project Description

- 1) Provide a narrative overview description of the Project, how the Project is being/will be implemented, the relevant participants/roles within the project, what participants typically experience, and any other key activities associated with Project development and implementation.
 - The plan for the project is to establish an Extracurricular/Enrichment Activities Stipend Pilot Program for foster youth ages 12-21 who have expressed both interest and barriers to engage in these activities. In partnership with CYC, the project will be implemented by foster youth, their social worker or their identified support system who will assist in the referral completion and implementation process. The relevant roles will continue to be expansive including the youth, social worker, identified support system members in addition to identified staff who are collecting and managing data systems information as well as financial obligations of the program. CYC members will support in developing the referral process and data collection. By providing the opportunity for Enrichment/extracurricular activities the youth will be able to engage in social interactions, mental health wellness as well as build lifelong connections that could positively impact their life direction.

This program would include:

1. That \$100 per month is provided as a supplement to the existing foster care payment for enrichment and extracurricular activities.
2. Youth will engage in a referral process to make them aware of the purpose of this funding. This process will include engagement of the youth's caregiver. The referral process will help identify and plan out the activity or activities and costs associated. This referral process can take place with a social worker, a caregiver, an agency worker, or any supportive adult in the community that the youth has identified (a teacher, mentor, coach, extended family member, etc). This referral will also be shared with the youth's social worker to be included in the youth's case plan.
3. The youth's documentation will include: a. How the enrichment funds will be used for the young person and b. How the young person was involved in determining how the funds are used.
4. Stipend recipients would participate in data collection led in partnership with the county agency and California Youth Connection.

Challenge/Problem	Potential Solution
Funding	Receiving this projected funding would allow for activities to be paid partially or in full for youth to engage in the extracurricular/enrichment option.
Transportation	This would be built into the referral process and identifiable during that referral process to limit any complications that would arise after committing to the chosen activity.
Support from caregivers	We would work with the caregiver to find a solution to the barriers identified during the referral process.
Knowledge of opportunities available	CYC youth would be able to assist in creating an ongoing list of extracurricular/enrichment activities available to the youth in the community and present that list to the foster youth seeking activities.

2) Identify which of the three INN project General Requirements the project is/will be implementing.

- Introduces a new practice or approach to the overall mental health system, including, but not limited to, prevention and early intervention
- Makes a change to an existing practice in the field of mental health, including but not limited to, application to a different population
- Applies a promising community driven practice or approach that has been successful in a non-mental health context or setting to the mental health system.

3) Briefly explain how the selected approach has been determined to be appropriate.

- This is a Youth identified need in the foster care community and the need for these opportunities to provide healthy and safe mental health outlets for the youth engaged.

# of individuals to be Served (estimate)	Cost per Person
146	\$1,200.00

4) If applicable, estimate the total number of individuals expected to be served annually, cost per person and how these estimates were developed.

- With the project amount being \$200,000.00 the costs will be broken down in the following statements.
- These costs were estimated based off \$100.00 per individual for 12 calendar months for all participants totaling \$176,000.00.
- In the event the entire amount of \$176,000.00 would not be utilized proposed project would be enhanced to include large group extracurricular experiences in the community setting.
- In addition, funding in excess of \$176,000.00 totaling \$24,000.00 would be utilized for staff in order to facilitate and manage the review of all referrals. In addition to processing funding, as well as all financial expenditures tracking and reporting process to assigned Shasta County Analyst. This individual would be responsible for compilation and completion of the annual fiscal review for the projected project. This individual will also support the collaboration with CYC to facilitate data collection.

5) If applicable, describe the population(s) to be served by the project, e.g., age group, gender identity, orientation, language spoken and other important demographics/characteristics.

Due to the limited amount of funding available, we want to prioritize referrals to the pilot program from youth who are from vulnerable communities. This includes but is not limited to the following: native youth, youth in ITFC Homes, parenting and pregnant Youth, and dual-jurisdiction youth (child welfare AND probation)

Age Group	# of individuals	Race	# of individuals	Sexual Orientation	# of individuals	Gender Identity	# of individuals	Language Spoken	# of individuals
0-15 yrs.	427	White	514	Lesbian or Gay	NA	Female	284	English	543
16-25 yrs.	145	African American or Black	6	Heterosexual	NA	Male	285	Spanish	29
26-59 yrs.	NA	Asian	2	Bisexual	NA	Transgender woman	1	Vietnamese	0
60 & older	NA	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	Queer, pansexual, and/or questioning	NA	Transgender man	2	Cantonese	0
		Alaska Native or Native American	15			Genderqueer	NA	Mandarin	0
		Other	1	Other	NA	Other	NA	Tagalog	0
		More Than One Race	34	Declined to Answer	NA	Declined to Answer	NA		
		Declined to Answer	0	Disability			# of individuals	Cambodia n	0
Veteran		Ethnicity		Communication	# of individuals	Mental (not SMI)	20	Hmong	0

	# of individuals		# of individuals	Seeing	0	Physical/Mobility	0	Russian	0
Yes	NA	Hispanic	29	Hearing or Having Speech Understood	0	Chronic Health Condition	5	Farsi	0
No	NA	Non-Hispanic	543					Arabic	0
Declined to Answer	NA	More Than One Ethnicity	0	Other (specify)		Other (specify)		Other	0
				None	572	Declined to Answer	0		
Total Estimated Number of Individuals to Be Served:					360				

2. LEARNING GOALS/PROJECT AIMS

A. Describe the Project's learning goals/specific aims and what potential contributions will be made to the expansion of effective practices.

- Enhance the engagement of foster youth in both the community setting as well as a chosen setting for enrichment/extracurricular activity opportunities where the youth can engage in both healthy and safe interpersonal interactions resulting in positive mental health outcomes. Potential contribution that could enhance the successfulness of this project would be actively engaged interaction from other community partners. Building partnerships and expanding on programs offered to youth in the community settings would also improve upon the effective practices.

B. What does the County want to learn or better understand over the course of the INN Project, and why have these goals been prioritized?

- Shasta County along with youth driven testimonies are wanting to enhance the understanding of social interaction in community settings for foster youth in addition to the effect on youths' mental health. Foster youth participants of the local chapter for CYC spoke to County officials regarding their concerns and personal testimonies of barriers in place that hinder them from being able to participate in extracurricular/enrichment activities in the community. These barriers not only have created a lack of social engagement and interaction but have also added to the concerns surrounding youth mental health conditions presenting that have long term effects. Youth attested to the positive influence that being able to participate in these activities has had on both mental health concerns in their lives as well as driving forces for future events in their lifetime. This project will allow us to better understand how the ability to pursue interests and hobbies can support resiliency and stability for foster youth while navigating the child welfare system.

C. How do the learning goals relate to the key elements/approaches that are new, changed or adapted in this Project?

- The project being introduced has never been advanced or utilized by county officials in previous projects. The projected outcome is that youth will become aware of opportunities that are available in the community allowing them to participate in healthy and safe enrichment/extracurricular activities.

D. For continuing projects, include any modifications to the project learning goals/specific aims in response to lessons learned during project implementation.

- NA

3. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A. Explain how the Project is consistent with the priorities identified in the Community Program Planning Process.

- The CYC members who developed the pilot program proposal are stakeholders. CYC members are: people living with mental illness or addiction, people from historically underserved communities (including foster youth), people from diverse backgrounds. CYC is also a non-profit advocacy organization that has been advocating for the identified stakeholders for over 35 years. CYC members presented this information, and the need for community support and intervention for foster youth, at a county directors meeting and will also be presenting at a MHSA stakeholders meeting. Stakeholders have identified the need to implement innovative strategies to support youth and that foster youth have a high need for mental health supports and services, that go beyond medication and talk-therapy.

B. Provide a description of how the current/proposed project relates to the General Standards of the MHSA.

- **Community Collaboration:**
The youth and their families will get connected with involved citizens in the community, and as a result enhance their lifelong connections. By collaborating with CYC, this project will ensure that there is collaboration happening at multiple agency levels and that youth voice is heard and involved in planning and decision making.
- **Cultural Competence:**
By being engaged in activities in the community that are provided by and participated in by various individuals, along with the opportunity to engage with those participants on a more intimate level therefore enhancing exposure to various cultures and diminishing stereotypes and misconceptions. The youth that participate in the pilot program will also have the autonomy to choose activities that are culturally relevant to them.
- **Client and Family Driven:**
Participation in extracurricular/enrichment activities allows for engagement and enhancement surrounding family interaction and involvement which could include an opportunity for the youths biological extended family to take part in the support of youth engagement of these activities. In addition to support of youth engagement this could also provide the enhancement increase for family visitation opportunities which has been proven to have a positive effect on youth in foster care. Youth will be directly involved in decision making in choosing their activities and the process will be youth driven. Youth will have the ability to choose a trusted adult to create a referral for them and support them in planning out the activity, including identifying any costs or barriers to participating in the activity.
- **Wellness, recovery, and resilience focused:**
Youth engaging in extracurricular activities not only allow for the youth to have the social engagement and interactions component which many foster youth in care struggle with, it also is providing them the opportunity to participate in an activity that they enjoy. Studies have shown that youth who can actively engage in liked activities enhances natural and safe dopamine's in the body giving children the "feel good" effect without utilization of recreation

use of narcotics. Additional benefits to engaged interaction are providing a sense of belonging for youth who feel out of place because they are separated from their biological family. Being part of a team or group provides a sense of closeness and desire to be wanted and needed that many foster youth in care struggle with. Creating a small circle of lifelong support from both friendships gained as well as mentorships developed during these activities helps to enhance the positive outcomes for youth in care.

- Integrated service experiences for clients and their families, i.e., the client, and when appropriate the client's family, accesses a full range of services provided by multiple agencies, programs, and funding sources in a comprehensive manner:
Participation in extracurricular/enrichment activities allows for engagement and enhancement surrounding family interaction and involvement which could include an opportunity for the youths biological extended family to take part in the support of youth engagement of these activities. In addition to support of youth engagement this could also provide the enhancement increase for family visitation opportunities which has been proven to have a positive effect on youth in foster care.

C. Explain how the Project evaluation is/will be culturally competent and includes/will include meaningful stakeholder participation.

- CYC would like to have an ongoing partnership with the agency to establish this pilot program at the local level to obtain the qualitative and quantitative data needed to secure funding that would make enrichment activities accessible to ALL foster youth in California. As a youth-led organization composed of current and former foster youth, CYC will ensure that stakeholder engagement is frequent and meaningful. CYC will support ongoing data collection, including a survey and interviews of program participants to measure the impact of enrichment activities on mental health, placement stability/status, lifelong connections and education. CYC will also ensure that youth are at the center of the decision-making processes and partner with contracted staff to develop the referrals. Cultural competency is a high priority for CYC and CYC members will support the agency in prioritizing the youth having access to culturally relevant activities of their choice.

D. Describe how community stakeholders are meaningfully involved in all phases of INN projects, including evaluation of INN projects and decision-making regarding whether to continue INN projects.

- CYC members developed the original idea of the pilot program, including the data collection and presenting the pilot program proposal to high level decision makers. As a youth led organization, CYC involves youth at all levels of decision making including the final approval of the proposal. The agency will attend quarterly meetings with CYC members, staff and monthly meetings with the contracted staff to support collaboration and ensure the goals of the pilot program are being met and to support data collection from the program participants. CYC members will be highly engaged and have frequent opportunities to provide and implement feedback.

- E. If individuals with serious mental illness receive/will receive services from the continued/proposed project, describe the County's plan to protect and provide continuity of care for these individuals upon project completion.
- The goal is that youths long term support system members would be attending these activities and that they would be providing the safety and support to the youth. The data collected from participating in this activity will support securing ongoing and recurring funding for enrichment activities for all foster youth. There are also funds available from the CDSS Flexible Family Funds that can provide transitional support for youth participation in enrichment activities following the conclusion of the pilot program.