

Civicorps: Foster Youth-Informed Education Project

Final Evaluation Report

September 2017





Contents

Introduction2

Key Findings and Themes5

Moving Forward 11

Introduction

Background

Civicorps has a long history of providing student-centered programs to one of the East Bay's most vulnerable populations—18 to 26 year old youth—nearly all of whom are people of color and have been impacted by living in under-resourced communities. The program provides transformative educational and employment opportunities that help young adults earn a high school diploma, gain real-world job training, pursue post-secondary education, and ultimately, achieve careers that offer family sustaining wages. Civicorps works with about 190 students (called corpsmembers) each year; staff report a graduation rate of 72%, and a 73% rate of placement in college and/or employment one year after graduation¹.

The Civicorps program has three core phases designed to support student needs:

- **High-School Diploma.** For the first four months, students attend Civicorps Corpsmember Academy for 32 hours per week, taking the classes needed to obtain a high-school diploma. The innovative educational approach includes an academic portfolio instead of credits, individualized learning plans, and one-on-one tutoring. After four months, students begin paid job training during the day and attend classes in the evening, working toward their high-school diploma at their own pace. During the entire high-school program, students also engage in soft skills training, trauma-focused case management, mentoring, community service, career and college counseling, and leadership development.
- **Job Training.** After their first four months in the program, Civicorps provides corpsmembers with paid job training for 32 hours per week, so students can earn an income and gain occupational skills, softy skills, and industry certifications.
- **College and Career Support.** For 12 months post-graduation, Civicorps offers assistance with applying for jobs, placing youth in internships, enrolling in community college, accessing services not found on college campuses during evening classes (e.g., tutoring, special education support, case counseling, etc.), and procuring resources.

In 2014 Civicorps received a three-year grant from the Walter S. Johnson Foundation for its Foster Youth-Informed Education Project to develop a deeper understanding of foster youth that participate in its program and strengthen its program model to address the acute needs of this vulnerable population. According to the Legal Center for Foster Care and Education, the high school graduation rate for foster youth is 50%, and only between 2-9% earn a bachelor's degree². Additionally, foster youth face significant barriers in finding family-sustaining careers.

Foster youth fall squarely in line with the population currently served by Civicorps but, historically, the program has not systematically identified foster youth in its program. This means that the experiences, progress, and outcomes

¹ Graduation and placement rates were reported directly from Civicorps staff, and were not ascertained through Harder+Company's engagement.

² Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care (2014)

of foster youth students—a population that tends to face even greater pressures related to trauma, learning disabilities, and emotional and mental health needs—were largely unknown or only supported by anecdotal evidence.

Civicorps partnered with Harder+Company Community Research to advance their efforts in the following areas:

- Strengthen data tracking and analysis of the foster youth population
- Improve the program model and best practices for foster youth
- Understand the efficacy of the program model and practices for foster youth
- Share lessons-learned, practices, and models across the field to improve educational outcomes for foster youth.

Overview of Evaluation

This final report marks the end of a two-and-half-year engagement with Civicorps that started in January 2015. The first half of the evaluation focused on (1) developing foundational knowledge of the program model, (2) reviewing student-level data and data collection practices, and (3) collecting qualitative data from key stakeholders and experts in the field. Specifically, the evaluation completed the following activities from January 2015 to May 2016:

- A **logic model** that outlines program inputs, activities, and short- and long-term outcomes to ensure that evaluation questions and methods are directly in line with the outcomes and goals the program hopes to achieve.
- A review of Civicorps' **student data collection system and processes**, and provided **recommendations** for updating and strengthening data collection tools, systems, and processes to meet the short- and long-term goals of the program.
- Four **focus groups** with foster youth and corpsmembers engaged in different stages of the program—orientation, learning academy, job training, and post-high school graduation. Focus groups explored topics such as, student needs and challenges, quality of services and interventions, satisfaction with the program, and the day-to-day experiences of students.
- **Interviews with Civicorps staff and partners in the field** to obtain their perspective on the needs of foster youth, challenges of implementing program elements for foster youth, and recommendations to strengthen the program model for this population of students.
- An **initial review of Civicorps student administrative data** to identify the strengths, gaps, and limitations of the data for future in-depth analyses.

A summary of key themes and findings from these activities was included in an interim report. After completing these activities and discussing lessons-learned and next steps for the evaluation, the Civicorps and evaluation teams concluded that the final half of the evaluation should pivot to focus on analyzing quantitative data from Civicorps primary student data collection system—CorpsNET. Honing in on Civicorps' student data would strengthen the programs' understanding of student characteristics and outcomes, and how these vary by student subpopulations. This was a collaborative effort between Civicorps and the evaluation team that required

substantial work to identify, clean, and structure data in a useful format.

This final report focuses on the analysis of Civicorps' student-level data, which examines how the characteristics and outcomes of foster youth compare to Civicorps' general student population. The report is organized into the following sections:

**Key
Findings
and Themes**

- Methods and limitations
- Who are Civicorps students?
- What happens to Civicorps students?

**Moving
Forward**

- Students: Program assets and recommendations
- Partners: Program assets and position in the field
- Evaluation: Further exploration and evaluation readiness

Key Findings and Themes

As highlighted above, the second phase of our evaluation focused primarily on analyzing Civicorps student-level data. Our main goals for this quantitative analysis were to 1) better understand student characteristics and outcome attainment, and 2) explore how foster youth students compare to the general student population in these areas.

Focus group findings detailed in the interim evaluation report suggest that Civicorps foster youth students face a number of barriers to school success, including housing instability, emotional trauma, limited access to affordable and consistent quality childcare, incarceration, and a general lack of support and trust in others—based largely on past life experiences. Findings from our analysis of student-level administrative data show that these barriers are quite common across the entire student population, and are often particularly notable for foster youth students. In addition to confirming previous findings, our analysis also led to new insights into student challenges, as well as areas of resilience.

The sections below outline our data analysis methods, and key findings around student characteristics and outcome attainment.

Methods

Analysis for this final report builds on previous work completed by the evaluation team and highlighted in the interim report. Evaluation for the interim report included administrative data for nine student cohorts dating back to October 2014. These nine cohorts are included in the final analysis, along with six others, for a total of fifteen cohorts spanning from October 2014 through February 2017. These fifteen cohorts represent a total of 290 Civicorps students. Within this group, 60 individuals (22%) were identified as foster youth students³.



³ Foster youth students include any Civicorps participants who indicated “yes” during their intake process, when asked if they had ever spent at least one day in a foster or group home.

Building on the hard work involved in compiling data for the interim evaluation, Civicorps staff once again put a great deal of effort into collecting and reporting clean and useable data for the final evaluation. This data includes student intake assessments recorded in CorpsNET, as well as detailed historical information on enrollment, assessment scores, behavioral and attendance incidents, and program progress.

For all characteristics and outcomes explored, the evaluation team’s analysis included comparisons between identified foster youth students and non-foster youth students. In addition to highlighting observable differences between the two groups, we also conducted more advanced analyses⁴ to identify which of these differences were *statistically significant*. In these cases, statistical significance gives an added degree of certainty that the differences observed are systematic patterns, and less likely to be the result of chance or coincidence.

Participant Characteristics: Who are Civicorps Students?

Civicorps provides academic and employment services to vulnerable youth who juggle a number of challenges throughout their engagement with the program. Many of these challenges are consistent across the entire participant population. This report section highlights select findings around participant characteristics, and explores where differences are apparent between foster youth and non-foster youth students⁵.

General Student Population

Among the population of Civicorps students *as a whole*:

- 60 individuals (22%) were identified as **foster youth students**.
- The average student **age** was 22 years.
- 64 percent of students identified as **African/African American**, 23 percent identified as **Hispanic/Latino**, 8 percent identified as **Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander**, and 5 percent identified under another racial category.
- 64 percent of students identified as **male**, and 36 percent as **female**.
- 35 percent of students reported being **unhoused, or living in unstable housing**.
- 84 percent of students reported having **regular access to food** either “always,” or “for the most part.”
- Almost half (47%) of students indicated that their **mental and emotional struggles** were at least “somewhat” a barrier to success.
- 5 percent achieved a passing score on their **language** entry assessment, 8 percent passed their **math** entry assessment, and 11 percent passed their **reading** entry assessment⁶.

Student Data Overview

- 15 cohorts: Oct 2014 – Feb 2017
- 290 total Civicorps students
- 60 foster youth students (22%)
- Sources: CorpsNET intake assessment forms; CorpsNET historical records; academic assessment records

⁴ Advanced analyses included Chi-Square testing and independent samples *t*-testing.
⁵ Please see attached databook for findings across all participant characteristics.
⁶ Civicorps staff assess students at intake—and at regular intervals—using subject tests designed by the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), a not-for-profit educational services organization.

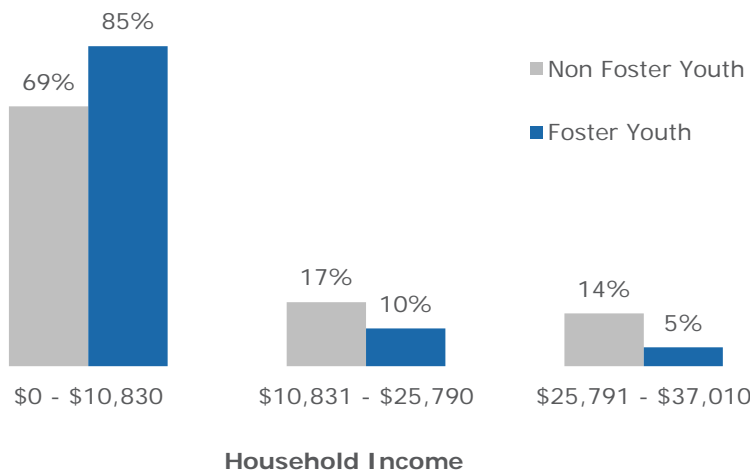
Foster Youth Student Challenges

Through comparing participant characteristics, the evaluation team identified a number of key differences between foster youth and non-foster youth students.

Civicorps’ foster youth students are significantly more likely to have children than their non-foster youth classmates (48% vs. 32%). This finding provides important context to our previous focus group findings on foster youth students’ difficulties juggling parenting responsibilities with program attendance. The difference in student parenthood rates underscores the need for adequate and sustainable childcare for foster youth students, in order to ensure the opportunity for program progress.

Foster youth students report significantly lower household income levels than other Civicorps students. Eighty-five percent of foster youth students reported living in households with an income of \$10,830 or less, while 69 percent of non-foster youth students fall in that category. This disparity in household income highlights the unique and pervasive challenges foster youth students carry into their enrollment with Civicorps. The disparity also speaks to the importance of financial stability in encouraging ongoing attendance and participation. Coupled with focus group findings on foster youth students’ difficulties balancing school and employment attendance with meeting basic needs, the household income gap highlights the importance of providing Civicorps participants with financial relief and incentives, whenever possible.

Exhibit 1. Household Income by Foster Youth Status



Foster youth students are significantly more likely than other Civicorps students to have been victims of violence in their lifetimes. When asked at intake whether they had ever been a victim of violence, half (50%) of foster youth students reported that they had, compared to 31 percent of non-foster youth students. This disparity in violence victimization is important for Civicorps staff to keep in mind when working with students, as participants may be entering the program with lasting impacts related to acute and/or ongoing trauma exposure.

Foster youth students are significantly more likely than other Civicorps students to have been incarcerated in their lifetimes. More than half (55%) of foster youth students reported during intake that they had been previously incarcerated, compared to 38 percent of non-foster youth students. Our previous focus group findings suggest that, for many foster youth students, emancipation

Foster Youth Students:

- More likely to have children (48% vs. 32%)
- Lower household income (85% vs. 69%)
- Higher likelihood of violence victimization (50% vs. 31%)
- Higher likelihood of incarceration (55% vs. 38%)

“When I came back from the foster home, I had no motivation to go to school. I dropped out of high school and haven’t been back to school ever since.”

–Student

often leads to multiple forms of instability, including incarceration. The observed disparity in incarceration rates speaks to the importance of responsive wraparound services for foster youth students, a point echoed in both the student focus groups and partner interviews.

Student Resilience

While students enter Civicorps with a number of challenges and destabilizing circumstances, they also bring noteworthy **strengths and assets** to their program participation, demonstrating tremendous resilience.

- 72 percent of foster youth students have **health insurance**, and 51 percent receive regular **medical check-ups**.
- More than two-thirds (72%) of foster youth students reported at least some **degree of support** from family and friends.
- 81 percent of foster youth students reported that they at least “somewhat” possess the **skills and tools to manage their emotions**.

Participant Outcomes: What Happens to Civicorps Students?

Civicorps students enter the program seeking a space to overcome trying circumstances; most live in under-resourced communities, and almost all have been unsuccessfully served through the traditional school system. Program participants juggle numerous and conflicting responsibilities in their lives, which often impact their ability to move steadily through the academic and employment curricula. Despite these challenges, Civicorps students—both foster youth and not—have worked incredibly hard to stick with the program and make progress.

The following section outlines Civicorps students’ outcome attainment, to the extent possible. In presenting these findings, we note specifically if and when foster youth student outcomes differ from those of other students. The evaluation team worked closely with Civicorps staff to identify clear and reliable individual-level program data, and to compile that data into meaningful and measurable outcomes. In this sense, our analysis was planned around the available data.

While staff have made tremendous progress in data tracking during our years-long engagement, important limitations still exist. We believe these limitations can be significantly reduced in the coming years by building on staff’s notable capacity building progress to date, and by exploring enhanced, validated tools and methods for student data collection. We believe these developments would enable us to explore student outcomes more deeply and reliably by—for example—tracking each student’s timed and detailed progress through program benchmarks, tracking student service use and counseling support, and tracking progress and development in student’s readiness and wellbeing⁷.

Student Progress and Attrition

Civicorps students bring both significant challenges and extensive resilience to their participation in the program. Participants work extremely hard to progress through the academic and employment curricula, but this progress is not always linear. Students often drop in and out of the program—sometimes for circumstances out of their control—and may at times move back and forth between academic levels.



⁷ We provide more insight into building evaluation readiness in the ‘Moving Forward’ section that follows.

To better understand the progress of both foster youth and non-foster youth students through each phase of the program, we conducted a point-in-time snapshot analysis of participants near the close of the evaluation.

Of the 290 students included in our analysis, **90 percent entered A Group (entry level) of the academic program when they enrolled⁸.**

- 30 percent of these students were currently in A Group at the time of analysis, 15 percent had progressed to B group, and **55 percent had completed the core academic program and progressed to paid job training.**
- Among the students who had progressed from A Group to paid job training, **40 percent had received their high-school diploma at the time of the snapshot analysis.**

Notably, there do not appear to be significant differences between foster youth and non-foster youth student trajectories. In other words, **foster youth students proceed through the program and graduate at roughly the same rate as non-foster youth students.**

Students' capacities to steadily progress through program levels largely comes down to their ability to remain connected over time. Because of Civicorp's relatively open door policy—which often allows participants to cycle back into the program after exiting—as well as the long-term touch aspect of the model, **the total amount of time students have spent in the program varies widely.** At the time of analysis, total length of program participation among the population of Civicorps students as a whole ranged from 1 month to 53 months, with an average of 8 months. This means that **the typical student, when accounting for potential exits and reentries, has had touch with the program for approximately 8 months in total.** To offer context for this average, Civicorps staff report that the average program participant takes approximately 15 months to graduate.

Most participants have difficulty maintaining steady contact over the course of their enrollment in the program and, on average, **students commit one attendance violation (e.g., arriving late to class) per month.** Civicorps staff place a great deal of emphasis on reliable and consistent attendance, and multiple incidents can result in short or long-term suspension from the program. **While consistent attendance is a core component of Civicorp's model, this can be particularly difficult for foster youth students;** focus group participants acknowledged that reliable attendance is crucial to academic and employment success, but highlighted the difficulties of balancing attendance with competing life demands.

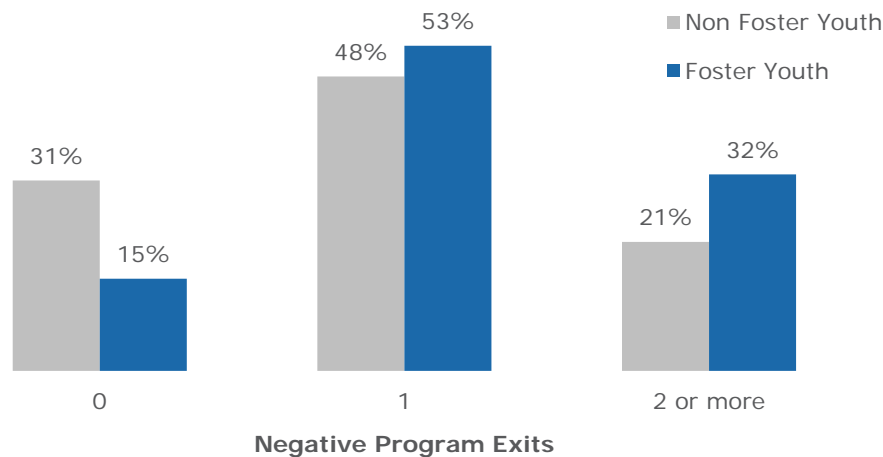
Civicorps foster youth students' challenges maintaining steady attendance are further underscored by data on program exits and terminations. To examine long-term participant attrition, the evaluation team used data tracked by Civicorps staff on students exiting and re-entering the program over time. In doing so, we found that **foster youth students are significantly more likely than other students to have a high number of negative program exits⁹.** Thirty-two percent of foster youth students have exited the program under negative circumstances **two**

⁸ The remaining ten percent of new students entered with a high-school diploma and were enrolled directly in the paid job training program.

⁹ Negative program exit categories/reasons include: absenteeism; academic; childcare; family/personal issue; health; incarceration; insubordination; job abandonment; transportation; violence/harassment

or more times over the course of their enrollment, compared to 21 percent of non-foster youth students.

Exhibit 2. Negative Exits by Foster Youth Status



Our findings on foster youth students and their increased likelihood of exiting the program are consistent with the struggles these students voiced in previous focus groups. Civicorps’ foster youth students face a number of barriers to maintaining program progress, including difficulty securing childcare, limited transportation options, and housing instability. These barriers are clearly reflected in the fact that, for those foster youth students with two or more negative program exits, **66 percent of exits were due to absenteeism and job abandonment**. These findings underscore the importance of supporting foster youth students in their attempts to balance life demands, in order to encourage progress through the program.

Foster Youth Students: Top 5 Program Exit Reasons

- For those with 2 or more negative exits:
- 66% due to absenteeism/job abandonment
 - 9% due to violence/harassment
 - 5% due to incarceration
 - 5% due to insubordination
 - 5% due to health reasons

Summary of Key Findings

Civicorps students approach their participation in the program with a number of unique personal and environmental circumstances, many of which are particularly challenging for foster youth students. At enrollment, these foster youth students are more likely to have children, more likely to have lower household incomes, more likely to have been a victim of violence in their lifetimes, and more likely to have been incarcerated.

Despite their many challenging circumstances, Civicorps students—both foster youth and not—bring tremendous resilience and strengths to their time in the program. Although many students—and especially foster youth—struggle to maintain attendance and steady program participation over time, Civicorps participants work incredibly hard to progress through the academic and employment components of the program. Foster youth students experience significantly more negative program exits—particularly for absenteeism—than non-foster youth, though they nonetheless progress through the program at the same rate as their peers.

Considerations related to these findings, as well as implications for evaluation moving forward, are outlined in the section that follows.

Moving Forward

After engaging with Civicorps' staff, students, and partners over the course of the last two and half years and analyzing student data, the evaluation has learned a great deal about Civicorps' students, the life experiences of their foster youth, and the program model. We heard time and time again from each stakeholder group that foster youth are severely impacted by systems-level challenges and inequities—resulting in housing insecurity, disconnection, trauma, violence, and run-ins with the criminal justice system—yet the **strength** and **resilience** of these students is almost unmatched. We learned about Civicorps' comprehensive program model that aims to get youth their high school diploma and into postsecondary education and/or the workforce. This aim on education and job training, combined with the focus on particularly vulnerable youth, makes the program a unique asset to the region. We also observed an interesting and important duality about the program. While Civicorps has the persona of being tough and no-nonsense, it is simultaneously viewed as being extremely supportive and flexible. Students and partners concurred, this balance is critical for ensuring the success of Civicorps' students. Though we have learned a lot about Civicorps' program model and students, we have only begun to scratch the surface on uncovering the nuances of its student subpopulations, student support services, and student outcomes.

This section of the report summarizes program assets and areas for further development highlighted by students and partners during focus groups and interviews. We conclude this section by taking stock of future areas of exploration to advance our understanding about Civicorps' students and program model, and areas of opportunities to build Civicorps' readiness to evaluate their program.

**“Civicorps doesn’t give
up on you.”**

—Student



Students: Program Assets and Recommendations

Throughout the course of the evaluation, we conducted several focus groups with Civicorps students who identified as foster youth. These discussions focused on their experiences in different stages of the program (orientation, Learning Academy, and Job Training); the unique barriers that make it difficult for foster youth to succeed in school and attain a career; and recommendations for program improvement. Foster youth highlighted the following as areas where Civicorps excels as a program and areas where the program can be strengthened.

- **Dual focus.** Students were motivated to enroll in Civicorps because the program offered them the opportunity to attain a high school diploma AND participate in a paid job training program. The “paid” component of job training was viewed as being particularly critical for meeting more immediate financial needs while they pursued their education and training with longer-term goals in mind.
- **Support.** Given past and ongoing challenges they face, foster youth emphasized the critical role that support systems play in their life. Foster youth lauded Civicorps for their effort to building community among peers and for having supportive teachers, counselors, and leaders. Students highlighted the role of teachers and counselors in helping them successfully complete the Learning Academy, and they complimented Civicorps staff at large for their dedication and commitment to student success. Students also highlighted the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) as an important component of the program. AVP provided an opportunity for new students to share lived experiences and to exchange personal stories. Through participation in AVP, students strengthened their communication and inter-personal skills and became comfortable with the school environment, staff, and their peers. Students sought motivation from each other as they embarked on a new program together.
- **Resources.** Civicorps’ wraparound services helped students address fundamental levels of need, including acquiring food and clothing, so that they could attend and focus on school or job training. Students also sought and received assistance with transportation, getting a driver’s license, hygiene kits, financial assistance, and housing referrals.
- **Specialized assistance.** Although foster youth appreciated the type of resources Civicorps offered, they highlighted the need for specialized assistance, particularly in the areas of **housing** and **childcare**. Students expressed that these two areas are important gaps in services that make it difficult for them to consistently attend the program and to pursue their educational and employment goals. They recommended (1) providing child care onsite or partner with a community resource to offer childcare services near the school and (2) hiring a case manager or social worker to help coordinate services (i.e., housing) for students and facilitate linkages to community resources. In response to these recommendations—originally highlighted in our interim evaluation report—Civicorps staff have hired a housing coordinator to help alleviate a significant barrier to student success.
- **Inconsistent policies.** While Civicorps is recognized for being highly adaptive to meet the emerging needs of students and to address evolving programmatic issues, it is also viewed as being too flexible at times, almost to a fault. For example, students conveyed their frustration with inconsistent or ever-changing program rules and regulations, particularly

“I feel very confident [about completing the program] because I have focus in my mind about what I want right now and that’s a high school diploma. Even if it didn’t work out and there are bumps in the road...I would still be focused in school because there’s only one person that can stop me, and that’s myself.”

—Student

in the paid job training (JTC) portion of the program. Students indicated that Civicorps regularly revised JTC rules and regulations without ample notice to students. They recommended creating more transparency when program rules and policies are revised by announcing revisions to program rules at a community meeting and to provide at least a 30-day notice. These recommendations were subsequently implemented by Civicorps staff after they first appeared in our interim evaluation report.

- **Attendance policies.** Students struggled to balance Civicorps attendance requirements with other demands in their lives. They described the difficulties they encountered in the program (particularly in job training) and having to address other priorities in their personal lives such as finding housing, addressing children's needs, or following-up with probation. Although students recognized that having a structured work environment with clear attendance expectations was an important part of the program, they still recommended more flexibility with the enforcement of attendance requirements. Students expressed that being prematurely removed from the program or being forced to take a leave of absence due to attendance issues hindered their ability to accomplish their educational goals and, at times, left critical gaps in income.

Partners: Program Assets and Position in the Field

The evaluation team interviewed professionals in various sectors across the region that work directly with foster youth. This included professionals that work in nonprofit/advocacy organizations, county agencies, probation, and legal services. The primary purpose of these interviews was to gather their reflections on the Civicorps program and develop a stronger understanding of how Civicorps fits into the larger system that supports foster youth. Partners highlighted the follow points in these discussions.

- **Dual focus.** Civicorps' combined education and job training model was identified by partners as what sets it apart from other programs in the region that serve foster youth. Students' ability to earn income while in job training was highlighted as a critical element of the program.
- **Approach and resources.** Partners believe that the Civicorps model is aligned with the needs of foster youth and is well suited to serve this population. They believe that Civicorps' staff understands the needs and life experiences of foster youth. The model and staff reinforce personal accountability, while providing necessary supports. Additionally, partners believe that Civicorps students have access to resources and services that are critical to achieve success. (See call-out box to the right.)
- **Continuity and community.** Unlike many other programs, Civicorps works with students until age 26 and continues to have an open-door policy for students to re-enroll in the program and access services. Because of this model, partners believe that Civicorps can play an important role in keeping foster youth compliant with AB12 regulations¹⁰. Partners also highlighted the sense of community that Civicorps develops for students, an element that is particularly critical for foster youth.

Civicorps Services & Activities

Educational Services

- Charter School – 32 hours/week
- Outreach/recruitment
- Intake
- Individual assessment
- One-on-one tutoring
- Career & college counseling
- Social support/wraparound services/trauma-focused case management

Employment Training

- Job training –32 hours/week
- Soft skills training
- Leadership development
- Mentoring
- Community service
- Social support/wraparound services/trauma-focused case management

College & Career Support

- Ongoing college and career support for 12 months post-graduation

“As we look back at AB12 and the idea of what other programs can be offered to support our young people, Civicorps should definitely be in that conversation.”

–Partner

¹⁰ AB12 allows foster care for youth to extend past age 18, up to age 21. To maintain eligibility, youth must be working toward completion of a high school degree or GED, enrolled in college or vocational education, or participating in a job training program.

- **Part of the Village.** Partners perceive Civicorps as “part of the village” that supports foster youth, and they applaud Civicorps’ willingness to communicate and engage with foster youth-serving agencies and organizations. Given that more than 1 in 5 students served by Civicorps has touched the foster care system, partners recommend that Civicorps (1) expands their knowledge of the policies that affect foster youth and (2) deepen relationships and strengthen communication with foster youth-serving agencies and organizations, including formalizing partnerships through the use of MOUs. This can strengthen communication, referral, and monitoring processes that are critical for supporting foster youth.

Evaluation: Further Exploration and Evaluation Readiness

The Walter S. Johnson Foundation grant that funded this project brought greater awareness and understanding of Civicorps’ foster youth students. Until now, the unique characteristics, needs, and outcomes of these students were, to an extent, masked by the similarities they share with Civicorps’ larger opportunity youth population. Though commonalities outnumber the differences between foster youth and the general student population, the differences (particularly in the areas of being a victim of violence and incarceration) carry weight and warrant close attention. These finding, alone, can be used to shape and inform organizational polices, staff training, and service provision.

This project marks the beginning of an ongoing agenda to develop a rich and deeper understanding of Civicorps’ students and practices. This work has also unveiled areas where Civicorps can strengthen their readiness to engage in evaluation and research. To continue to build upon the lessons-learned and momentum gained from this project, we outline below a few (1) areas for further exploration and (2) recommendations for building evaluation readiness.

Area for Further Exploration

- **Develop a clear and comprehensive understanding of various student subpopulations** (i.e., foster youth, justice-involved youth). Understand commonalities and variations within and across student groups, including basic demographics, needs, and assets.
- **Continue to explore student outcomes and other indicators of progress.** This includes progress in the program (i.e., movement from step to step, graduation), as well employment outcomes and changes in areas such as social-emotional, mental, and behavioral health.
- **Explore how various Civicorps policies (i.e., attendance requirements and disciplinary practices) impact student attrition and success.**
- **Document the model, understand the efficacy of services, and identify high-leverage activities that promote student success.** The Civicorps program model has evolved and continues to adapt to meet emerging student needs. There is an opportunity to get clarity on the program model and services. Additionally, given constraints on organizational capacity, it could be important to understand what services need to be offered in-house versus through referrals or partnerships.

Building Evaluation Readiness

- **Expand and refine use of CorpsNET to systematically collect student data.** This can include types of services received and dosage, as well data collected from other sources such as student surveys. The focus should be on consistency and quality for data collection.
- **Improve data collection instruments and practices.** This includes:
 - Using validated measures and instruments to assess student needs and track progress over time.
 - Improving data collection on mental health, behavioral health, substance use, attendance, progress, and attrition/persistence.
 - Refining the intake assessment and structure data so that it provides valuable information for service provision and research. 🏠



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