



METROPOLITAN ATLANTA YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES INITIATIVE

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR YOUTH
AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE



The Community Foundation
FOR GREATER ATLANTA

The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta connects people to the issues and organizations making a difference in our region. We provide personalized philanthropic advice to individuals and families interested in making a long-term impact with their giving, and we provide community leadership on critical issues in our region. Together with our donors, partners, volunteers and community leaders, we are improving communities in our 23-county region through philanthropy.

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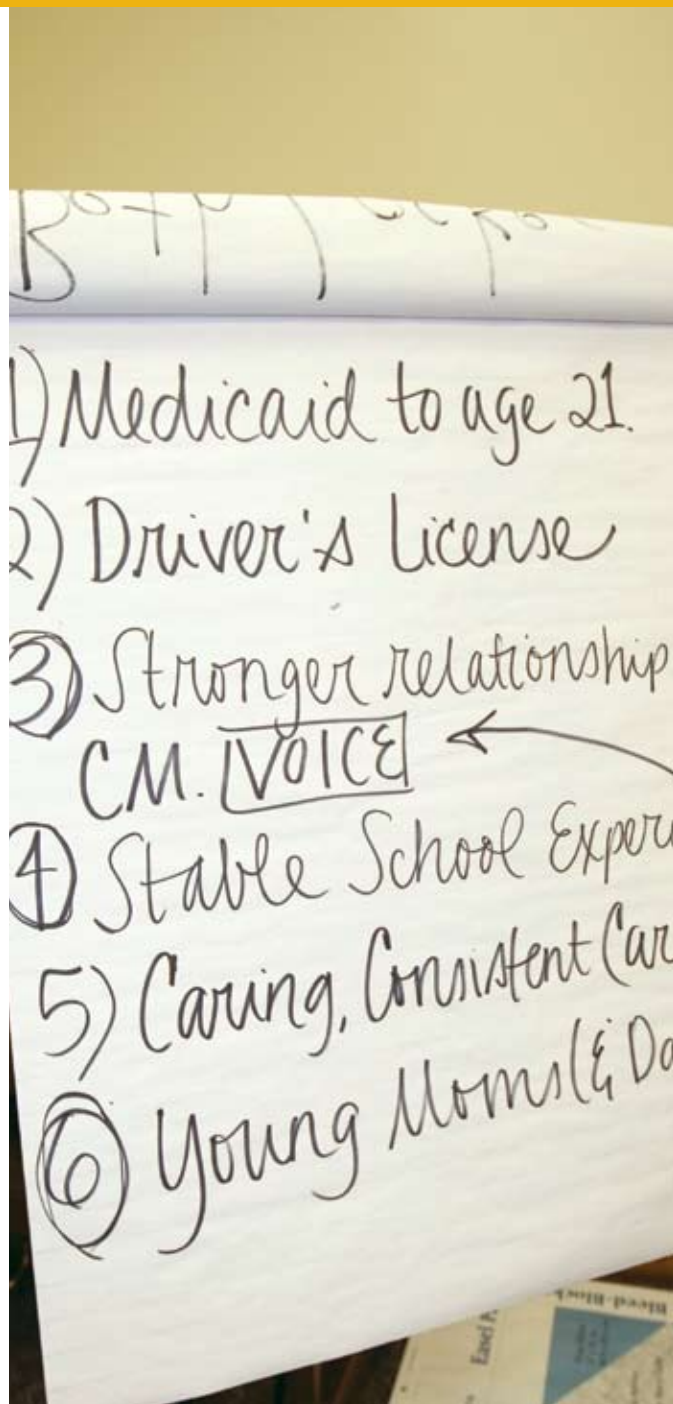


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About MAYOI The Metropolitan Atlanta Youth Opportunities Initiative (MAYOI) creates better outcomes for youth transitioning out of foster care in metro Atlanta. MAYOI's goal has been to collaborate with service providers in the areas of education, employment, health care and housing and to identify service gaps and ultimately help these agencies better serve youth moving from foster care to adulthood.

Capturing Lessons This paper provides The Community Foundation's perspective about MAYOI: how it came to exist, how it was implemented, how it has evolved and lessons we learned about making the initiative sustainable and scalable. The paper also considers how this initiative influenced our community leadership capabilities.

Foreword

Through the Metropolitan Atlanta Youth Opportunities Initiative (MAYOI), the challenges faced by youth aging out of foster care have been put squarely on the public agenda in Georgia. MAYOI's strategies have improved the likelihood of young people making a successful transition to adulthood and have set the stage for long-term and sustainable impact.

How has MAYOI improved the landscape from 2003 to now?

- Young adults who participated in MAYOI are now influencing the system.
- A clear framework of six key issues has been identified by youth as the top advocacy priorities to be addressed, and leaders from the public, private and nonprofit sectors are collaborating on reforms. Youth in every community will benefit from financial literacy training and individual matched savings accounts as they age out of foster care because the groundwork has been laid for statewide expansion.
- Relevant data from multiple sectors are being regularly reviewed by key stakeholders to drive key decisions.
- The public, private and nonprofit sectors are leveraging resources and collaborating to support this population in key areas of housing, education, employment and health care.

Our role in MAYOI has brought national recognition to The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta. In 2010 we were presented the national Paul Ylvisaker Award for Public Policy for our work with emancipated foster youth and public policy engagement. The Harris Wofford Award of Youth Services America honors organizations that encourage youth to assume substantive roles in their communities, and we received it for MAYOI in 2007. Both awards show awareness of Georgia's responsibility to smooth the way from foster care to adulthood, and recognition that MAYOI has played a role in illuminating the path.



Introduction

Invited to Shape Change

Since 2003, The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta has been in partnership with the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (the Initiative) to advance a comprehensive model for helping youth transition successfully from foster care to adulthood. The model has been introduced in more than a dozen communities across the country. The Community Foundation was invited to lead implementation in the Atlanta region, where the model was named the Metropolitan Atlanta Youth Opportunities Initiative (MAYOI).

The Community Foundation's early involvement allowed us to help shape the pilot specifically for our community. In addition, for the first time ever we functioned as a direct service provider, gaining valuable insights about the pros and cons for our organization of serving in this capacity.

MAYOI as a Community Initiative

The decision to participate reflects one particular dimension of our community leadership work. When an issue is critical and there is energy within the region, we will engage directly in community initiatives to promote specific types of change and create new community capacity. Examples include the Atlanta AIDS Fund, Atlanta Women's Foundation, Georgia Center for Nonprofits, the Neighborhood Fund and the Metropolitan Atlanta Arts Fund. In each of these efforts, The Community Foundation was an initiator, catalyst and advocate. At other times our community leadership takes a different role, whether through staff leadership with organizations or bringing funders and donors together to address a community need.

MAYOI is an example of a successful community initiative created in partnership with a national funder. When approached about directing an Atlanta version of the Initiative, The Community Foundation agreed to do so after research and evaluation of relevant factors:



- 1 Most of the state's nearly 14,000 children in foster care were in metro Atlanta, and effective mechanisms for aging out of the system were a pressing local need. The Initiative's model appeared to offer these mechanisms.
- 2 Public and nonprofit child welfare capacities were in place, with assets and momentum on which to build a viable program for transitioning out of the foster care system.
- 3 With our knowledge of philanthropic and community leaders, we were confident that a committed, talented group with the right mix of experience, connections and personal capacity could be brought to the table as advisors. Discussions with potential partners confirmed that we could recruit a critical mass of relevant resources and leadership, based on our tradition as a successful convener.
- 4 The political climate was favorable, in part because Governor Sonny and First Lady Mary Perdue were former foster parents and strong advocates, and in part because of recent media focus on the foster care system and child protective services.
- 5 Also, we confirmed that special components, such as banking services, could be delivered as anticipated by the Initiative model.
- 6 Finally, in considering our own capacity to drive the program, we evaluated our structure, leadership, staffing, internal systems and culture and recognized that there was no other more appropriate convener for this work. Based on all of these factors, we entered into a partnership with the Initiative that resulted in the creation of MAYOI.

Part I: MAYOI Origin

◆ The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Model

The Initiative was founded in 2000 specifically to address the growing problem of youth aging out of foster care without adequate resources, skills and support structures to become stable, productive adults. It was established by two of the country's most respected child welfare foundations: the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which focuses on disadvantaged children and their families, and Casey Family Programs, which strives to reduce the number of children in foster care. Both foundations were established by the late Jim Casey, founder of UPS, and his family.

The Community Foundation was approached by the Initiative to provide local leadership for a national pilot program aimed at improving outcomes for youth aging out of foster care. The Initiative would provide us with three years of funding to bring to life a model program in metropolitan Atlanta that would serve 225 youth. MAYOI emerged from these discussions as one of several initial pilot sites around the country to be funded by the Initiative.

◆ Theory of Change

The Initiative based its model on the conviction that in order to change outcomes for youth who emancipate from foster care, certain conditions must exist:

- Young people are decision makers and advocates for themselves and others.
- Partners in public and private systems provide the necessary resources and support.
- Stakeholders use data to drive decision making, communications, and the documentation of results.
- Public will is galvanized by the need to improve outcomes, and policy is focused on the reforms necessary to improve outcomes.
- Young people have access to an array of opportunities that support them.

◆ Critical Transition Factors

The Initiative model focused on instigating change in four broad areas: education, employment, healthcare and housing. Change would come both to systems and to individual youth. The model was flexibly designed for adaptation to different communities.

A core strategy was the Youth Opportunity Passport™, which had three components:

- 1 an **Individual Development Account**, or IDA, through which the Initiative would match youth savings dollar for dollar;
- 2 a **debit account** to help youth build a credit history, reinforced by financial literacy training;
- 3 **Door Openers** – a range of way-paving mechanisms through which youth could gain access to education, employment, healthcare, housing and other priority needs.

◆ Our Role

The Community Foundation agreed to lead by partnering with the Initiative. We received a planning grant to establish feasibility and develop the basic Initiative model for use in metropolitan Atlanta.

In addition, we could add value through our considerable experience in incubating start-up projects and moving them to self-reliant, sustainable status – as we had done with the Georgia Center for Nonprofits, among others.

Some aspects of our partnership with the Initiative took The Community Foundation into unusual territory. It was atypical for us to act as a direct service provider, as we committed to do for the three-year pilot. This involved establishing a small dedicated staff to engage youth and administer program elements. Our office adjusted to a flow of young clients, sometimes accompanied by their own infants and toddlers. Also, our MAYOI team learned that MAYOI youth had a large array of needs, sometimes urgent, on an almost 24/7 basis.

We had the advantage of a long, positive history with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Casey Family Programs. Because of this history, we viewed the Initiative as an extraordinary opportunity to work with true leaders in child welfare to enact positive change in a field of significant local and national need.

Of more than a dozen Initiative pilots implemented to date, we are the only community foundation that has been asked to serve as a lead partner. In other cities, this role has been performed by a nonprofit, a governmental agency, a university or a service-providing foundation.



The Glue

Rita Powell, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Consultant and Liaison for Atlanta

“Atlanta was identified early as a potential pilot site. The Community Foundation was willing to engage with us in the exploration stage, even before strategy or outcomes had been defined. We really played in the sandbox together. They were most clear that the young people themselves must determine what was needed, because only those who have experienced foster care know what should change.

“The Community Foundation brought many strengths such as excellent relationships in the community. They developed a matrix to identify capabilities and attributes that were needed for community partners. As the program evolved, they kept key players engaged at a high level, such as the State Department of Human Services. From coordinating MAYOI to assuring its sustainability, they have been the glue.” ■



“...the young people themselves must determine what was needed, because only those who have experienced foster care know what should change.”



“Through courses provided by MAYOI and the state’s Independent Living Program, Mariam learned money management and other life skills.”



Long Journey:

Refugee > Foster Care > MAYOI > Independent Adult

Mariam was 11 when an aunt brought her and a younger sister from Afghanistan to the U.S. as refugees. Once here, the aunt showed little interest in the girls. For three years the sisters lived together in foster care. After they were put in separate placements, Mariam saw her little sister only occasionally. “That was the hardest thing of all,” she says, although her own frequent placement changes also were difficult. From age 11 to 18 she was in four foster homes and three group homes.

Along the way she became connected with MAYOI, earned her high school diploma, worked and started community college. Through courses provided by MAYOI and the state’s Independent Living Program, she learned money management and other life skills. She took advantage of the matched savings program and soon will buy her first car. Up until now, she has depended mainly on friends for transportation to school and work. “I have great friends, they are a wonderful blessing,” she says.

At 21, Mariam supports herself, studies hard and hopes to become a doctor. She has learned to speak beautiful English, and she and her sister are preparing to become American citizens. ■

Part II: Dimensions of the Need

◆ National Snapshot: Life after Aging Out

Children/youth in foster care	510,000
Youth emancipating from foster care in year	26,000
Incarcerated in past 2 years	44.9% – males 17.9% – females
Unemployed at age 23-24	47.9%
Public assistance at age 23-24	29% – males 79% – females
Homeless in first four years	24.3%
Lack GED or high school diploma by age 23-24	27.9% – males 21.4% – females
Parent by age 23-24	44.3% – males (1.56 mean # of children) 66.8% – females (1.83 mean # of children)

- Child Welfare Information Gateway 2009
- Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 23 and 24, Chapin Hall – University of Chicago, April 2010

◆ Foster Care Trends in Georgia

When MAYOI was launched in 2003, the foster care population of Georgia was approximately 14,000. It peaked in 2004 at nearly 15,000. As of September 30, 2009, the number of Georgia children and youth in foster care had fallen to just over 8,000. During the same time period, annual emancipations in Georgia rose from approximately 400 to over 650.

These dramatic changes reflect national trends, the causes of which are beyond the scope of this document. The increased rate of emancipation is clearly relevant, however. As it continues, the need becomes more urgent for more community capacity to support transition to adulthood.

◆ Dynamics of Emancipation

Every study of foster care emancipation emphasizes that heavy odds are stacked against youth as they exit state care and strive to live on their own. At age 18 a youth ceases to be the responsibility of the state unless he or she chooses to remain in the system to age 21 in order to gain certain federally funded benefits managed by the state. Because of frustrations with the foster care system, many youth elect to make a complete break as soon as possible, even though they have little in the way of resources or a personal support system.

Frequently these youth have no trusting relationship with an adult; minimal exposure to stable home life; and scant experience that leads them to value advantages such as education, money management, preventive health care or life skills that help a person get along in the world. The wonder is that some achieve success in spite of these obstacles.



Breaking the Mold

Tacia has defied the pattern of post-foster care failure. She was one of the original youth participants in MAYOI, following six years of moving among family members and foster placements in New Jersey and Georgia.

“My DFACS coordinator told me about a new transitional program and asked me to go to a meeting. That’s where I learned about MAYOI, the matched savings, and what a Door Opener was. MAYOI was a group of kids brainstorming ideas for how to make it easier to leave foster care and get going in life. The adults were there to listen and figure out how to make our ideas happen. We told other kids in foster care about it, and a lot of them joined. That’s how MAYOI grew.”

Over time Tacia has tapped multiple dimensions of MAYOI for help with employment, education, housing and networking. Now 28, she holds a responsible job that involves service to youth in foster care. She has earned an associate’s degree and plans to continue her education. She saves regularly and stays current with bills. Using her IDA, Tacia has bought a car and is accumulating the down payment on a house for herself and her daughter. Her outlook is optimistic, and her ambition is powerful. ■

Part III: MAYOI Pilot: 2003-2006

◆ Key Early Decisions

Once The Community Foundation committed to be the Initiative partner for Atlanta, an important choice was made about how the program would be structured and managed. Two paths were identified: start a new nonprofit to be spun off after the pilot, or run the MAYOI pilot from within The Community Foundation and then transition to a sustainable independent management structure that leveraged existing public and private entities.

At the time, Lesley Grady had just become vice president for community partnerships at The Community Foundation. Working with colleagues and drawing from her experience as program director, she decided on the second path. Based on broad and deep knowledge of Atlanta's nonprofit landscape, she believed that capacity existed to sustain MAYOI if it proved viable as a pilot. Most likely this would be a partnership involving multiple entities with different strengths, and a connective mechanism to keep youth from falling through the cracks.

Another key decision involved hiring. Akilah Watkins became MAYOI program manager. In her early 20s, she had an activist background, high energy and ability to recruit and engage foster youth. Because of her age and relative lack of experience, the hire had risks – however, Akilah proved to be masterful at involving youth and eliciting thoughtful and committed participation.

Also, Claudette Clarke was an ideal liaison with the youth in her role as IDA administrator, relating to them with a “mom-like” mix of genuine interest, affectionate care and pushing. Originally it was planned that she would work half-time on MAYOI; however, her full-time focus was needed.

◆ Youth Board

A strong Youth Board was essential to the success of MAYOI. The original members were recruited largely through case workers and others who had a relationship with youth in foster care either through the state system or youth-oriented organizations. The youth comprised a 20-member board, all of whom were in foster care or recently emancipated. Ages ranged from 14 to 23. An early member, Anthony Reeves, was 18 when he joined. Anthony says that after the first few meetings of feeling their way along, the youth began to engage in free-wheeling brainstorming and debate. Ideas started to fly about barriers that stood in the way of successful transition and changes that could make a difference.





“Get Your Voice Heard”

Kobi entered foster care at age 10, along with four siblings. He changed placements frequently over the next eight years. A natural leader with an optimistic outlook, he was recruited for MAYOI at 16 and served as chair of the Youth Board. “So many times, your word is up against the foster parent or the staff person. Our main goal was to get the voice of youth to be heard. We learned to get our voices heard in a respectful way.”

For Kobi, the workshops, learning experiences and IDA savings program of MAYOI provided a path to becoming responsible. After high school graduation he entered the Air Force. Now 26, Kobi works for Cargill and has reestablished ties with his family. “I am a stronger individual for being in foster care,” he says. “You take what is meant for bad, and use it for good instead.” ■

**“I am a
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◆ **Youth Opportunity Passport Participants**

In addition to the Youth Board, many more youth were recruited to take advantage of the Opportunity Passport. Recruitment occurred through annual youth summits in each year of the pilot, with strong support from Georgia's First Lady Mary Perdue. Each summit was larger and more elaborate than the last, growing to include a job preparedness element and practical workshops. Word-of-mouth encouragement from current participants also was an important factor in recruiting youth to participate.

After three years, 225 youth were enrolled in the Youth Opportunity Passport. This signature element of the Initiative offered appealing incentives:

- *Individual Development Account* – The Initiative provided a dollar match for every dollar a youth saved, available for education, housing, car purchase, healthcare and similar essential needs. All funds saved by MAYOI youth were matched at least 1:1 and some matched up to 4:1 through a United Way program that encouraged such uses as home purchase, educational tuition and entrepreneurial ventures. During the pilot period the IDAs enabled 3 home purchases, 12 apartment deposits, the start-up of 3 small businesses, 45 vehicle purchases, and educational expenses for 8 MAYOI youth.

The Initiative also required financial literacy education for every youth with an IDA. All pilots utilized a specific curriculum designed to complement the Opportunity Passport.

- *Debit Account* – MAYOI youth with an IDA savings account also received a bank-issued debit card. It was tied to an account into which they could deposit their own funds along with incentive and reward payments from MAYOI for participation and achievement. Because of problems with overdrafts, this component is not being heavily promoted in statewide expansion.
- *Door Openers* – The Youth Board identified multiple needs related to their living circumstances and skills development. The role of the Community Partners Board (reference page 12) was to listen to the needs and determine how to provide the youth with access to solutions.





Whatever It Takes

A native of Stone Mountain, Georgia, Jeremy is living in Los Angeles and working on his first commissioned script. His motto is “whatever it takes,” and his goal is a screenwriting career. Jeremy, 23, also is learning entertainment from an actor’s perspective, with TV and film roles to his credit. His ties to Atlanta remain strong, especially to his 3 year old daughter.

Jeremy was 16 when he went into foster care, and soon after, he signed up with MAYOI for an IDA. At Southern Georgia Technical College he got into trouble, which led to a brief incarceration. Jeremy used the time to write a screenplay that later helped him land work. “It kept me sane,” he says. A friend paid for his plane ticket to LA. Once there, he had nothing to live on but his wits until his IDA savings arrived to pay for an apartment.

At times, what Jeremy calls the “foster care mentality” returns, meaning that he expects bad things to happen and is uncomfortable with good things. “It takes a long time to shake those feelings off,” he says. “But then I remember, ‘That’s not me anymore.’” ■

◇ Community Partners Board

Recruitment

With staff in place and the Youth Board started, enlistment of Community Partners followed. The selection criteria revolved around previous involvement in youth issues and the capacity to address needs identified by the Youth Board. Prospective Community Partners were invited to a meeting at a local retreat center. Rita Powell, Jim Casey consultant for the Initiative in Atlanta, explained the program with its youth-driven approach and Youth Opportunity Passport incentives. She described the Door Opener role of Community Partners. Members of the Youth Board were present and entered into the discussion.

Child Welfare Agency

A critical player among the Community Partners was the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS), which has responsibility for foster care through the Division of Family and Children Services (DFACS). DHS also manages the federally funded Independent Living Program (ILP) which provides services to youth in transition from foster care. During the pilot, ILP underwent two director changes, and DFACS changed top leadership twice. The need to reintroduce MAYOI so often could have been very damaging in sustaining state involvement; however, we had the benefit of a memorandum of understanding with DHS approved by Commissioner B. J. Walker, who has been a steady and strong supporter of the MAYOI pilot and subsequent expansion.

Other Public Agencies

The Department of Juvenile Justice was a natural participant. Additionally, we reached out to the Department of Labor and Department of Technical and Adult Education for help with employment and education priorities.

Systematic tracking and evaluation were integral components of MAYOI, as stipulated by the Initiative. Community Partner Michelle Barclay headed the Self Evaluation Team, bringing deep experience from the Supreme Court of Georgia Committee on Justice for Children and the Barton Child Law & Policy Clinic of the Emory University School of Law.

Private Sector and Nonprofit Partners

Business participants were strategically targeted to fit the program both functionally and with an eye toward youth engagement. An example was the recruitment of Washington Mutual as the original bank to manage IDAs. WaMu not only had experience with other IDA programs, its friendly, store-front style and extended hours made it popular with the youth. WaMu later was taken over by J. P. Morgan Chase Bank, which continues to manage 25 IDAs from the pilot. For expansion, SunTrust Bank had statewide capacity and became the IDA provider.

Kaiser Permanente was a key partner in addressing the health component of the Initiative model. Utilizing a subsidized care model developed for students in college or technical school who lack health coverage, Kaiser offered a program in which up to 40 MAYOI youth could pay \$20-30 a month for a plan emphasizing preventive care as well as timely treatment.

United Way became a Community Partner because it operated a program that could accelerate growth of the IDAs with a 3:1 funding match for housing use, and a 4:1 match for micro enterprises. Thus, a MAYOI youth who faithfully maximized the IDA could build significant savings to apply to the purchase of a home or the founding of a small business.

Individual Leader Partners

Also important among the Community Partners were several adults from philanthropic circles who brought valuable insight and perspective on youth issues. They included a number of philanthropists. One was Gary Lee, who brought an executive background with UPS and longstanding ties to the Casey Foundations. He was a donor with The Community Foundation as well. Another was Lucy Vance, also a donor with The Community Foundation. She had worked extensively with Families First and the Jean Childs Young Institute for Youth Leadership, which followed a youth-driven agenda philosophy similar to the Initiative. Her ability to instill conviction about this approach was very important.

National Foundation Partner

MAYOI offered a learning experience to The Community Foundation about working as a service provider on behalf of a national funder. While partnerships with national foundations were not new to us, the role of grantee was new, as we were simultaneously a local funder of many of the organizations involved in MAYOI. Also, the Initiative was very young when we became involved, and it was still feeling its way in many respects. Over the life of the pilot a sequence of different liaisons was assigned to work with us, and we spent much time bringing new players up to speed. Also, the Initiative continued to fine-tune the strategies of the model even as we were already implementing MAYOI in Atlanta. On occasion we were asked to make a change of direction that we felt was counterproductive, given the state of MAYOI's development at the time. The initial reporting requirements were onerous, and the frequency of conference calls for planning purposes got in the way of actual implementation. These situations were worked out to the satisfaction of both parties, and the relationship continues to strengthen today.



“We really depended on the youth to guide us on how things should work.”



Nothing For Us Without Us

The Youth Board took its leadership role very seriously, providing a stream of ideas about removing obstacles that complicate life after foster care. “We really depended on the youth to guide us on how things should work,” says Community Partner Lucy Vance.

Community Partners were equally serious about opening doors to workable solutions. An example was the complications that arise from the transient living status of many emancipated youth, which they called “couch surfing.” Without a permanent address they were unable to get a driver’s license, register to vote or receive regular mail. UPS provided a Door Opener solution by making free mailboxes available at UPS stores, along with copying and fax privileges. ■

◆ **Door Opener Highlights During Pilot: 2003-2006**

During the MAYOI pilot period, a total of 29 Door Openers were implemented related to employment, education, housing, physical and mental health and personal and community engagement. A sampling is described below:

Issue Identified by Youth Board	Door Opener Solution
<p>Lack of healthcare immediately after foster care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While in foster care, a youth receives health benefits through Medicaid • Medicaid benefits terminate when the youth emancipates out of foster care at age 18 • Emancipated youth do not have the financial means to purchase health insurance or pay directly for needed health services 	<p>In one of MAYOI’s most tangible and notable policy achievements, MAYOI youth took the lead in advocating successfully for policy change.</p> <p>Coaching and advocacy support was provided through Community Partners, including public speaking skills coaching.</p> <p>Youth made impressive, persuasive presentations in state legislative committees and Department of Human Services meetings.</p> <p>A \$1.5 million line item was put into the state budget to extend Medicaid coverage for emancipated foster youth to age 21.</p> <p>Also, Community Partner Kaiser Permanente initiated a program of subsidized health insurance for up to 40 youth. 10 participated during the pilot.</p>
<p>Homelessness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emancipated youth are vulnerable to homelessness due to lack of resources and family support system 	<p>MAYOI enlisted the Housing Authority of DeKalb County and the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta to develop a housing assistance program specifically for homeless youth emancipated from foster care.</p> <p>Up to two years of subsidized rental housing is provided for 14 emancipated youth ages 18-24 under a MAYOI program entitled Making My Way Home. The program has provided a homeless model program with potential statewide application.</p>
<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During and after foster care, youth have a variety of education needs. Among them are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Continuing education access – Skills training – Internet access 	<p>Community Partner United Way assisted 2 youth with a 3:1 match on IDA funds used for education.</p> <p>Financial skills training was provided by Washington Mutual to 125 youth.</p> <p>18 youth received public speaking training through Toastmasters.</p> <p>Georgia State University provided free computer and Internet access to 76 youth.</p>

Issue Identified by Youth Board

Door Open Solution

Job Opportunities

- Employment training and access to job opportunities was a key need for emancipated foster youth

Community Partners UPS, CVS, Office Max, Target and Omni Hotels became a job referral network for MAYOI.

The Georgia Department of Labor provided 40 youth with career interest assessments, resumé assistance and job search help.

Over the span of the pilot, 400 teen summer job slots provided by the Department of Human Services were utilized.

The Metro Atlanta YMCA provided 2 internship positions.

Collaborated with Georgia Budget and Policy Initiative to produce *Guide to Federal and State Sources that Support Youth Workforce Development With a Focus on Foster Youth*.

Rights

- Foster children and youth do not understand their rights to have input into their care plans
- Judges, case workers and others in the system often are not adept at encouraging and processing youth input

MAYOI entered into a partnership with the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation to assure a one child-one lawyer relationship. Five youth were served with free legal representation.

As a result of MAYOI, the Supreme Court of Georgia Committee on Justice for Children now trains judges and court personnel to work with foster children and youth to assure the protection of their rights.

Funds for food during emergencies

- Foster youth often emancipate with little or no money
- Unemployment is an ongoing problem

Community Partner Publix provided \$50 grocery cards for The Community Foundation to disburse to MAYOI youth in emergencies. Twenty youth were served in this way.

Permanent address

- Former foster youth often have a transient lifestyle they refer to as “couch surfing”
- Without a permanent address they cannot get a driver’s license (necessary for many purposes including employment), register to vote or receive mail

Community Partner UPS established 20 free mail boxes at UPS stores for MAYOI youth, also providing copying and faxing privileges. The value of this service was \$45,000.

◇ Snapshot: MAYOI at Conclusion of Pilot- February 2006

As MAYOI was moving from pilot phase to sustainability, a calculation was made of value leveraged from contributions beyond the Initiative funding. It identified \$750,125 in cash contributions and \$4,722,448 worth of in-kind goods and services, for a grand total of \$5,472,613 in leveraged funding. This helped to increase success in the following areas:

Population:

- 225 Metro Atlanta youth actively enrolled in Youth Opportunity Passport, with an additional 18 who had formerly been enrolled
- Average enrollee age – 21 years, 3 months
- 71% female, 29% male
- 82.7% African American; 14% Caucasian; 3.3% other

Asset Purchases:

- 25% of youth had made a purchase from an IDA
- 78 purchases equal to \$69,489 had been made
- 45 vehicles had been purchased
- 8 tuitions had been paid with IDA savings
- 22 housing rentals or purchases had been made
- 3 microenterprises had been funded

Work/Career Development:

- 100% of MAYOI youth still in school were participating in some form of work related experience on a weekly basis
- 55% had one or more part-time jobs
- For youth out of school, 70% had held a 40-hour/ week job for at least six months
- 97% of those out of school were living above the federal poverty line
- 72% were enrolled in or had completed post-high school training

Housing:

- 54% of MAYOI youth in school reported having a housing plan leading to safe, stable and affordable housing
- 35% out of school reported having such a plan and were accumulating housing savings
- 19% out of school reported having safe, stable and affordable housing located near public transportation, work or school

Healthcare:

- 71% reported having health insurance, either through Medicaid or the Kaiser Permanente subsidized plan
- 40% reported having mental health benefits
- 37% reported having both mental health and dental benefits
- 68% reported that they had access to critical health and mental health services



Health Access

For most emancipated youth who are striving to be self-sustaining adults, buying health insurance is a low priority. Just like other 20-somethings, they perceive the cost to be very high when compared to their need. After Medicaid coverage ends, former foster care youth typically go uninsured unless they receive non-elective benefits through work.

As a MAYOI Community Partner, Gloria Kemp, community benefits manager for Kaiser Permanente of Georgia, brought a solution. She understood that preventive care as well as timely treatment can be a difference-maker for young people struggling with financial challenges. “If they don’t have a way to get help for a minor illness, it can grow worse and lead to all kinds of problems. Then, on top of everything else, they have health issues.” According to Kemp, access to affordable health care is “an essential part of helping these young people stay or become whole.” ■

◆ **MAYOI Pilot in the National Context**

The MAYOI experience, along with the other three initial pilot sites, led to continued refining of the Opportunity Passports model for introduction to new locations throughout the country. This expansion has included the development and ongoing evolution of several important tools that are used in bringing the model to new locales. MAYOI has been instrumental in their development.

Today the Initiative is operating in 11 cities/regions across the country. As one of the original pilots, MAYOI has continued to generate learnings and insights during the evolution to the established program. A number of foundations are co-investors with the Initiative on their own local programs to assist emancipated youth. The Community Foundation regularly provides information, insights and advice to these organizations.

Logic Model: This site-level planning framework lays out an in-depth guide for a site to identify what it aims to accomplish and how it will measure results.

Rubric: The rubric identifies strategic imperatives and how they are to be advanced through different stages of the program. It is a mechanism for self-evaluation of progress and gaps.

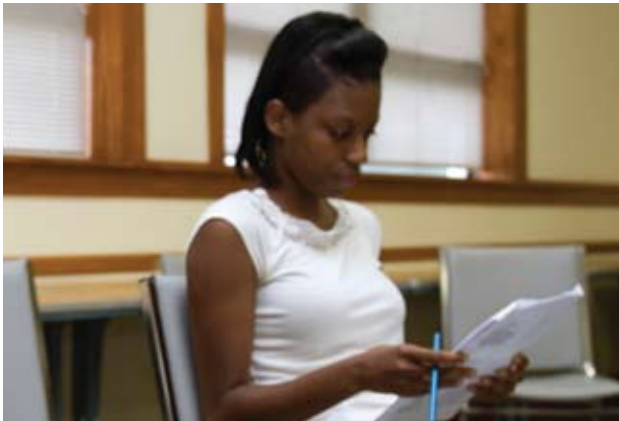
Policy Matrix: The matrix is a tool for bringing focus to laws, policies and regulations that impact the post-emancipation experience and identifying opportunities to remove barriers and enhance success.

Survey: Data gathering is a crucial aspect of the Initiative, and thus of every site program. The Youth Opportunities Passport Survey provides a uniform way to collect information on key indicators that apply wherever the Initiative is being utilized.



Part IV: Transition to Sustainability and Statewide Scale

Before the pilot formally ended in February 2006, The Community Foundation had already begun sustainability planning. Tyronda Minter joined MAYOI as program manager in 2004, bringing extensive experience in human services, public policy, youth development and social programs. With a masters degree in public administration, she had expertise in community capacity building and strategic planning. With this background and skill set, she was well equipped for both the management of MAYOI as it matured, and for the challenge of conceptualizing and constructing an effective successor framework.



From the beginning, sustainability was envisioned as a transition to management outside The Community Foundation. Responsibility for successful MAYOI components would shift to appropriate service providers for the long term, and the pilot money provided by the Initiative would be replaced with a new funding apparatus. The transition process was facilitated by the Initiative's willingness to continue funding at a reduced level for an additional two years.

Leaders of The Community Foundation had always assumed that sustainability would involve a combination of public and private agencies. Certain components of MAYOI required funding and policy influence that only government could provide. Other components called for the flexibility and nimbleness more often found in nonprofits.

Sustainability also meant statewide scalability. This would require both the local replication of some version of MAYOI and a statewide support framework for particular components.



Cornerstone of Sustainability

The five-county metropolitan Atlanta area where MAYOI proved itself as a pilot is very different from most of the rest of Georgia. While basic foster care emancipation issues are universal, the nature and capacity of prospective Community Partners in different locales varies widely. Scaling the model statewide demands flexibility and creativity.

An important success factor is in place, according to Gary Lee, chair of MAYOI Community Partners and an ongoing leader in expansion efforts. “The key players from state government remain at the table with the commitment to support this as a youth-driven model,” he says. “When the state is your scalable agent, that’s what sustainability is all about.” ■

◆ Sustainability Assumptions – Transition Phase, 2006-2009

These assumptions provided a foundation for the initial sustainability plan:

- The plan would prepare for the long term
- Related components of MAYOI would be bundled, wherever feasible, under common management
- The Initiative and MAYOI would jointly evaluate candidates to take over management of components
- Successor service providers would be chosen based on concrete criteria
- Some components would be best handled by statewide organizations while others would work better under local management
- The role of MAYOI staff would shift from providing service to youth to building capacity and providing technical assistance to organizations
- The transition would require transfer of relationships and social capital
- Flexibility and adaptability must be built into the plan so that components and support elements could be added
- Youth engagement would continue as a non-negotiable cornerstone
- In state agencies, involvement of high-level administrators as decision-makers must be retained

◆ Map To The Future

The Community Foundation assembled a small group of MAYOI stakeholders to work for three months to develop a transition framework around six functional areas. The group mapped out a path for each area from pilot status to sustainable operation. These functional areas were:

Funding Connections:

This involved moving from funding by the Initiative and management of funds by The Community Foundation to the assumption of funding leadership by the Georgia Department of Human Services, making the most of available federal and state funds. Supplemental funding would be sought from other entities such as United Way, national and local foundations and corporations. In addition, public-private partnerships would be established with local institutions such as banks, civic organizations, community colleges and faith-based organizations. The Finance Project provided expertise on sustainability and the structure of funding.

Increased Opportunities:

The three components of the Youth Opportunity Passport were to be divided between statewide and local responsibility. DHS assumed responsibility for the IDA and financial literacy component. With its statewide footprint, SunTrust became the post-pilot IDA provider, and The Community Foundation has provided technical assistance for IDA management as well. DHS selected the nonprofit agency Catalyst for Care to manage the IDA and financial literacy elements. However, Catalyst for Care ceased operations during the transition phase. DHS addressed this setback by bringing the financial pieces in-house, to be managed by the Department's Independent Living Program (ILP). Subsequently, ILP adopted the Federal Deposit Insurance Commission's Smart Money for Young Adults curriculum for financial literacy. It consists of eight modules covering different areas of financial planning, management and tools, plus additional asset-specific training that young people must receive before IDA savings can be drawn for a purchase.

Youth Engagement:

A smoother transition occurred with the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children (MAAC). This nonprofit was chosen to incubate youth engagement based on its experience in working with youth impacted by the system, coordinating youth activities, providing training to youth and delivering case management services.

The MAYOI Youth Board became a state-level Youth Leadership Group responsible for policy and advocacy, coordinated and supported by MAAC. “Youth tribes” have been established in DHS regions around the state to assure that youth engagement continues as a core strategy at the local level. These Youth Tribes identify issues and problems to be addressed locally.

In addition to supporting EmpowerMENT (see page 22) at the state level, MAAC provides support to 16 DHS regions in establishing and building up Youth Tribes. The DHS Independent Living Program coordinates the regions.

Partnerships and Resources:

Community Partners Advisory Committees with public and private membership were designated as Door Openers in the immediate community, while special initiatives such as the Making My Way Home pilot and employment programs developed on separate tracks. Working with the state-level Youth Leadership Group, MAAC provides focus on Door Openers of statewide importance.

This includes establishing a statewide Community Partners Board to include representation from each region and drive opportunity in key functional areas such as employment, education, housing and others.

Public Policy and Public Will:

Promoting changes in policies and systems became the responsibility of the state-level Youth Leadership Group, as well as the local Youth Leadership Boards and Community Partners Boards in their focus on local issues.

Research/Evaluation/Communications:

These functions were integrated into Youth and Community Partners Boards at both the state and regional levels. MAAC was made the convener for self-evaluation.

Through this mapping, a sustaining network emerged with DHS and MAAC playing major roles, and The Community Foundation continuing to be engaged for consulting and technical support.



The state-level Youth Leadership Group has named itself EmpowerMENT, styled to emphasize the importance of hearing “ME” in the voice of youth. Supported by MAAC, EmpowerMENT has identified six priorities:

- 1 Extending Medicaid to age 21 for emancipated youth. During the pilot this was accomplished through youth-led advocacy. MAYOI youth received public speaking coaching and made presentations to state legislators and DHS officials. Their success in winning approval was a breakthrough in establishing MAYOI as an empowering force. It should be noted that given current state budget challenges, funding for this benefit could come under pressure in the future.
- 2 Facilitation of obtaining a driver’s license. This addresses the barriers, such as assumption of liability, that complicate a teen’s ability to obtain a driver’s license when in foster care.
- 3 Having a stable school experience. This means avoiding school changes as much as possible and facilitating smooth transfers when they are absolutely necessary.
- 4 Developing stronger relationships between youth and case managers, with emphasis on the right of youth to be involved in decisions and foster care plans that affect them.
- 5 Building a network of caring, consistent and permanent relationships.
- 6 Helping youth who become parents while in foster care to remain with their children.

◆ **Promoting Localization Across Georgia**

As the pilot was ending, The Community Foundation began discussions with the Georgia Family Connection Partnership about participating in the sustainability phase. The Partnership has relationships and connections across the state, and we saw their value in recruiting youth and involving community supporters. In support of this effort, The Community Foundation provided technical assistance, tools and educational materials, plus \$5,000 local planning grants. This was one part of our effort to do the groundwork for taking MAYOI strategies statewide.

◆ **Making My Way Home**

This “pilot within a pilot” was designed by MAYOI as a Door Opener to bring intensive services to bear on emancipated youth vulnerable to homelessness. The goal is to end or avoid a homeless experience and build capacity for independent living. This program continues under the auspices of the DeKalb County Housing Authority, DeKalb County Community Development Department, and Nicholas House for case management services.

Making My Way Home provides up to 14 emancipated young adults at a time with safe, decent housing supplemented by counseling and case management designed to enhance living skills and ability to be self-sustaining.

◆ Independent Living Program Redesign

An important outcome of MAYOI has been a redesign of the state's Independent Living Program. The program is funded with federal money and managed by DHS. During the MAYOI pilot, opportunities surfaced to make the ILP more effective in providing access to employment, education, housing and health services. DHS recognized that changes were needed in how ILP provided support to youth, and the Initiative's Logic Model offered a helpful framework for doing this. The Initiative provided funding for meetings to redesign ILP, and The Community Foundation contributed technical assistance.

◆ Sustainability: Expansion Phase of 2009-2012

Achieving sustainability is an ongoing process. The Community Foundation participates in this process, although in a supporting role rather than a lead role as before. In the lead are MAAC as convener, the Independent Living Program of DHS, and the Initiative with continuing funding support.

The current phase of sustainability is reviewing successes and shortfalls of work done through 2009 in order to reinforce wins, close gaps and eliminate elements that have not stood the test of time. It includes evaluation of progress in scaling the program statewide and steps that can be taken to help local Youth and Community Partner groups to take hold.

Three year goals include:

- 100 open IDAs by December 2010, with 80% of them active.
- Between July 2010 and July 2012, add 180 new young people a year to the IDA program, with 80% active.
- These enrollments will occur through the regional system of the state's Independent Living Program.
- Achieve a stable funding situation through a combination of public sources, private philanthropy, service funding sources such as Americorps, and CRA funding through financial institutions.



Impact on State Programs

*Ebony Harris, Independent Living Program Coordinator
Georgia Department of Human Services*

“The MAYOI Logic Model brought a different shape and form to the (state's) Independent Living Program. It has helped us frame our work better around creating relationships that provide opportunities for foster youth aging out of the system. These range from housing to education to supportive relationships. We have sharpened our focus.” ■





Second IDA match keeps her rolling

Angelina was 9 when she was removed from her home for the first time. That separation lasted less than a year, but at 13 she returned to foster care and remained there. The situation was difficult for a while, but after two years she was placed with a new foster mom with whom she connected. “It got good,” she recalls. “I was young and stupid, and she helped me graduate. We are pretty close.”

Participating in MAYOI and its successor, EmpowerMENT, helped Angelina get on track financially. Her first car, a Ford Escort, cost \$1000 of her IDA savings and made it possible to attend Griffin Tech from her home in Jonesboro. “I put a lot of miles on that car,” she says. When it wouldn’t go any more, she bought a 2002 Nissan Sentra with the balance of her IDAs. It gets her to her job at Zaxby’s and nursing classes at Griffin Tech. With her 21st birthday coming up soon, Angelina is working to make a better life for herself and her 3 year old daughter. ■

“Participating in MAYOI and its successor, EmpowerMENT, helped Angelina get on track financially.”

Part V: Lessons Learned from MAYOI

In our community initiative work, The Community Foundation acts in multiple roles: as funder, catalyst, partner, nonpartisan convener and/or knowledge broker. While we approach each community initiative with a framework for success in mind, we recognize the need for flexibility and learning throughout the process. Through the Metropolitan Atlanta Youth Opportunities Initiative we gained insight about the issue of supporting youth transitioning from the foster care system and the ways in which funders can make an impact.



- Foster youth are fully capable of providing direction for reforming the system – in fact, reform without their input is invalid and certain to falter.
- Informed, committed adults will recognize the wisdom of experience and taking direction from foster youth.
- The combination of ideas generated by youth, and responsive actions driven by influential adults, can lead to authentic, positive change in the lives of youth coming out of foster care and moving to adulthood.
- MAYOI was strengthened by committed engagement at the highest levels of the Department of Human Services, which has responsibility for the state's foster care system. Strong state commitment has been an invaluable success factor.
- At the same time, certain aspects of MAYOI could never be managed effectively by the state. Nonprofits have flexibility and entrepreneurial qualities that are essential for some components. Even though the distribution of MAYOI components to a mix of service providers raises coordination issues, it is necessary to balance program management responsibilities among those best suited to specific tasks.
- As the model is imported to new locales, timelines must be flexible. Multiple moving parts must be aligned, which takes time and patience.
- Although imperative for the program's effectiveness, keeping foster youth engaged and committed is an ongoing challenge due to the high level of impermanence in their lives and relationships.



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