BUILDING A SCAFFOLD OF SUPPORT FOR YOUNG ADULTS IN FOSTER CARE:

THE MENTORED INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

JANUARY 2023

NYC Children

The Pinkerton Foundation

workforce PROFESSIONALS TRAINING INSTITUTE

FOREWORD

Jess Dannhauser
Commissioner

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October 28, 2022

Dear Colleagues:

New York City is committed to improving outcomes for youth in foster care. As part of this work, the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) has a variety of education and career-related initiatives underway for youth in care, including the Mentored Internship Program.

The Mentored Internship Program allows youth in care the opportunity to explore a career in public service or the non-profit sector. Since 2018, the Mentored Internship Program has engaged more than 900 young adults in foster care by connecting them to internships alongside the CEOs of foster care agencies, department heads, administrative staff and other public service or non-profit professionals who serve as their mentors. In addition to mentoring, the program offers social-emotional support through one-on-one supervision, career clubs, coaching and work experience provided by staff at ACS, foster care provider agencies and external partners. On behalf of ACS, I commend all those who have participated in the Mentored Internship Program, helping to make it a success. We are also pleased to partner with the Pinkerton Foundation to support this important initiative.

ACS will continue to invest in and support programs like the Mentored Internship Program. For instance, ACS just recently announced the expansion of Fair Futures, which now provides youth in care, ages 11 to 26, with coaching, employment and educational services. I look forward to continuing to work with our partners on these important initiatives.

Sincerely,

Jess Dannhauser
Commissioner

FOREWORD

The Pinkerton Foundation

Dear Colleague:

It started with a brief and seemingly offhand exchange in my office: "There are almost as many people working in the foster care system as there are young people in care...Maybe we should just make every worker responsible for one kid." A few weeks later, however, that simple idea took on new life when our VP/Executive Director for Programs Laurie Dien popped in with a bold plan. Building on an initiative that made a brief appearance a couple of decades ago, Laurie proposed a pilot for a mentored work experience that would pair young people aging out of care not with caseworkers but with other employees throughout their foster agencies.

Today, that pilot has blossomed into the Mentored Internship Program (MIP). Over the last six years, 900 young people (and growing) have taken part in these internships. Most have had no prior exposure to paid work. In the MIP, they team with mentors from HR, Development, Security, IT and a host of other departments to learn about the world of work and gain insights on possible careers. Thanks to training from the Workforce Professional Training Institute, Youth Development Institute and Youth Communication, the mentors have managed to achieve a difficult balancing act--nurturing young people who have often led tumultuous lives while demanding appropriate workplace and professional performance.

The program has had a profound effect on the young participants. The majority have stayed in school or decided to re-enroll in other education programs. Several have gone on to more traditional internships. A number have been hired for full-time positions at their agencies. In the process, they all have gained a new appreciation for the agencies that have served them. The mentors have grown as well. More than a few report a newfound respect for the talent and potential of young people they might have once dismissed or even feared. The result has been an important culture shift that deepens pride and unity throughout the agencies.

At Pinkerton, we are humbled by the engagement and persistence of the young interns, the creativity and dedication of the mentors, the continued backing of agency leadership and the commitment of the coordinators who lead the project at their respective agencies while working with the technical assistance groups to build a learning community that provides ongoing inspiration to the entire MIP initiative.

We couldn't be happier to be part of the team.

Sincerely,

Richard M. Smith
President & CEO The Pinkerton Foundation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE **FOSTER CARE MENTORED INTERNSHIP PROGRAM (MIP)** provides work readiness, career exploration, and paid internship opportunities to young adults in foster care with little or no work experience by pairing young adults with administrative staff and executive leadership at foster care agencies who serve as mentors. Implemented at 12 of New York City's foster care agencies with support from the Pinkerton Foundation and the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS), MIP has allowed approximately 900 young adults to participate in a mentored internship since 2018, where they have earned wages, gained work experience, and built meaningful relationships with adults.[1]

Programs such as MIP address the critical need for supportive transitions out of foster care and toward independence for young adults in the foster care system. Of the nearly 1,900 New York City youth in foster care enrolled in high school during the 2020–21 school year, only 50% were on track to graduate in the standard four years.[2] And 20% of young adults aging out of foster care in the mid-2000s entered the city's homeless shelter system within three years.[3] These young adults overwhelmingly want to work—more than two-thirds of respondents to the 2021 ACS Youth Experience Survey expressed an interest in finding work—but require assistance preparing for and identifying employment.[4] Furthermore, agencies working with foster care youth provide a broad array of services and assistance to youth in care, though not all specialize in workforce development.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of MIP, including its capacity building infrastructure established to both help individual agencies develop relevant programming and aid in the creation of a dynamic learning

and sharing community across participating agencies. Drawing on document review, interviews, and focus groups conducted with key stakeholders, the report features best and promising practices emerging across the participating agencies. Practices highlighted focus on elements of program design and implementation, as well as program integration into agencies' broader portfolios.

Mentored Internship Program: Best and Promising Practices

PROGRAM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Program Recruitment and Enrollment:

- Drawing on program alumni to spread the word and share their experiences with peers
- Making use of social media to connect with and stay in touch with young adults
- Gathering required documentation as soon as possible

Supervisor and Mentor Recruitment:

- Leaning on executive messaging and behavior to recruit supervisors and mentors
- Working to reduce apprehension or fear toward the time commitment

Making Intern-Mentor Matches:

- Starting with intern aspirations and goal setting to target mentor outreach and commitments
- Using intern growth areas—combined with an assessment of available support—to make matches
- Creating detailed job descriptions to aid the matching process

Establishing an Intern's Scope of Work:

- Placing equal importance and emphasis on the performance of concrete tasks and the development of critical skills
- Building in some flexibility for interns to exercise creativity and problem-solving skills—and creating a forum for sharing the outputs

Program Design:

- Making space in the program for youth voice and input
- Building and broadening interns' social and professional networks in the course of preparing them for their next steps
- Making space for interns to build their own peer networks during and beyond the program

PROGRAM INTEGRATION AND CULTURE CHANGE

Integrating MIP into the Agency:

- Housing MIP program staff and administration within a department responsible for related programming
- Including other staff responsible for working with interns in MIP planning, check-ins, and program operations

Integrating MIP Interns into the Agency:

- Using internships to broaden the perspectives of agency staff
- Integrating interns into agency meetings and events in addition to assigning tasks

Seeding and Achieving Culture Shifts within the Agency:

- Acknowledging the cumulative and catalytic power of shifting perceptions over time
- Not underestimating the power of executive messaging and support

The MIP model holds promise as a strategy for supporting young adults beyond those in foster care. Challenges encountered by multiple agencies, however, risk blunting the impact of the program model. Systemic issues identified across the MIP community include accessing the extensive documentation one typically needs for an internship and subsequent employment; securing funding of a sufficient amount and with a degree of flexibility to subsidize internship wages; ensuring an adequate supply of candidates ready for and interested in participating in the program; and building the organizational capacity necessary to support a robust internship program that can lead to unsubsidized employment opportunities. Sustainability of MIP and future expansion—be it to additional foster care agencies or to other populations likely to benefit from the model—depends in part on addressing these systemic challenges in tandem with efforts to strengthen program implementation at participating agencies.

MIP, by the telling of those administering and participating in the program as interns or mentors, sets the stage for positive work, learning, and networking experiences. Further examination of the emerging promising and best practices—along with the systemic challenges identified—can yield valuable insights into the potential impact of supportive models such as MIP on the lives of young adults and on the approaches pursued by agencies working with them.

List of Abbreviations

ACS	Administration for Children's Services
MIP	Mentored Internship Program
SYEP	Summer Youth Employment Program
WPP	Work Progress Program
WPTI	Workforce Professionals Training Institute
YAWORC	Young Adult Work Opportunities for Rewarding Careers

INTRODUCTION

Never did we allow young people to be in the soup pot with us before MIP, to experience what happens behind the scenes. All they usually see is a case worker, but they don't know what happens when the computers shut down and you have to call IT, or how that issue might impact them.

CASHAY HAFFONEY,
former Journey Program coach supervisor at Catholic Guardian Services

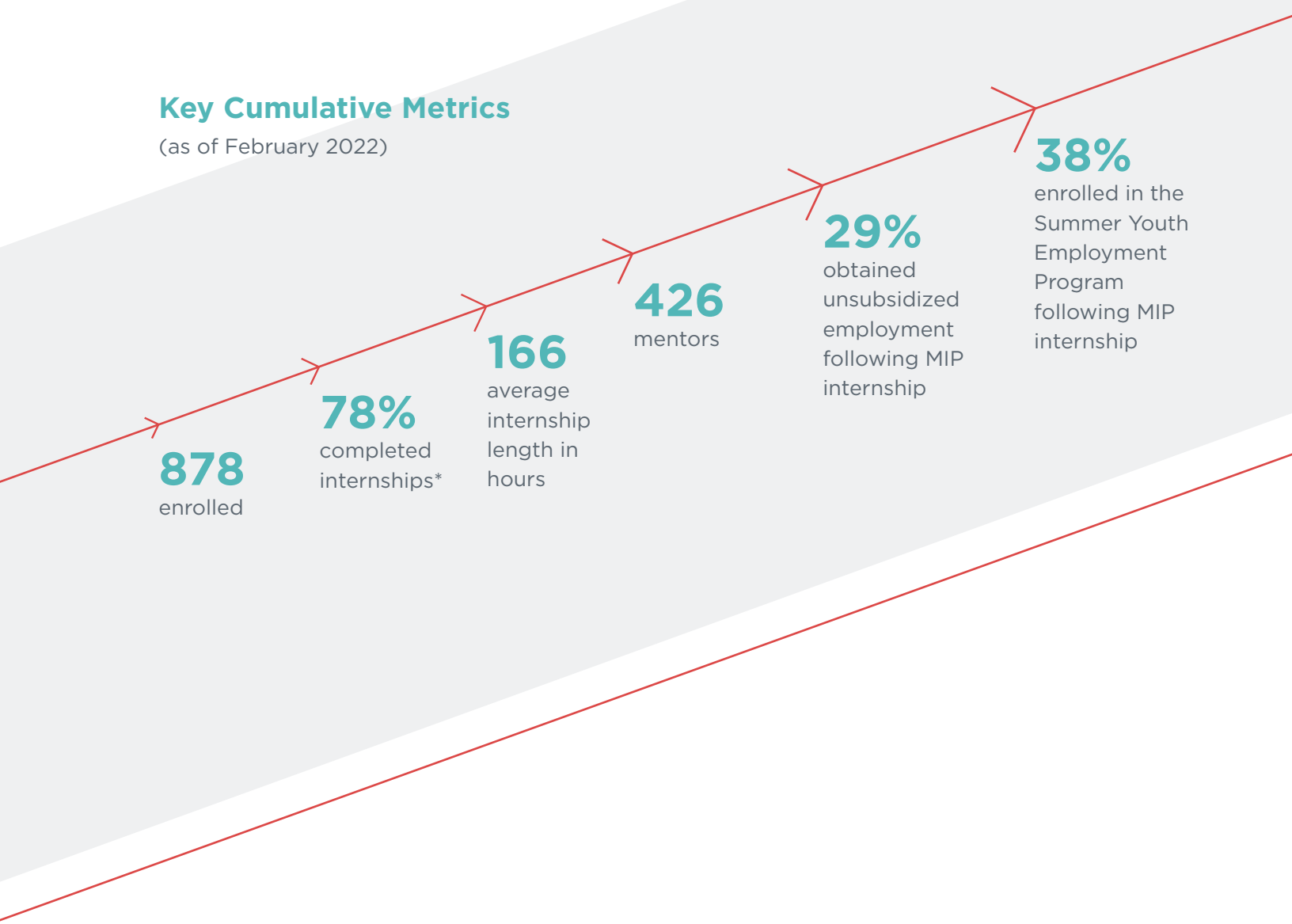
YOUNG ADULTS IN FOSTER CARE NEED A WEB OF SUPPORT AND EXPERIENCES to help them reach their full potential as they transition from adolescence to adulthood and seek economic self-sufficiency. Employment and meaningful work experience is critical to ensuring a successful transition; however, many youth in care struggle with emotional trauma, mental illness, multiple foster care placements, low literacy skills, low self-esteem, and a lack of adult role models—factors that on their own create obstacles to employment and only compound when coincident. Yet many young people in care display resilience in response to these challenges and possess talents and ambitions on par with those of young people not in care—assets of value to prospective employers and society at large.

Recognizing the need to help foster care agencies better prepare youth in care for employment, the Pinkerton Foundation and New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) launched the **Foster Care Mentored Internship Program (MIP)** in 2018. Currently involving 12 of the city's foster care agencies,[5] MIP provides work readiness, career exploration, and paid internship opportunities to young adults in foster care with little or no work experience. The program pairs young adult interns with executive leadership, administrative staff, back office staff, and other staff at their respective agencies who serve as mentors. This program design makes possible the achievement of positive outcomes for youth in care while also planting the seeds for cultural changes within foster care agencies by more directly involving

executive and administrative staff with the youth their agencies serve. These interactions are hypothesized to alter staff members' perspectives about the young people who are in the care of their agency. MIP includes an ongoing, intentional capacity building program to support participating agencies in their implementation of the model.

Key Cumulative Metrics

(as of February 2022)



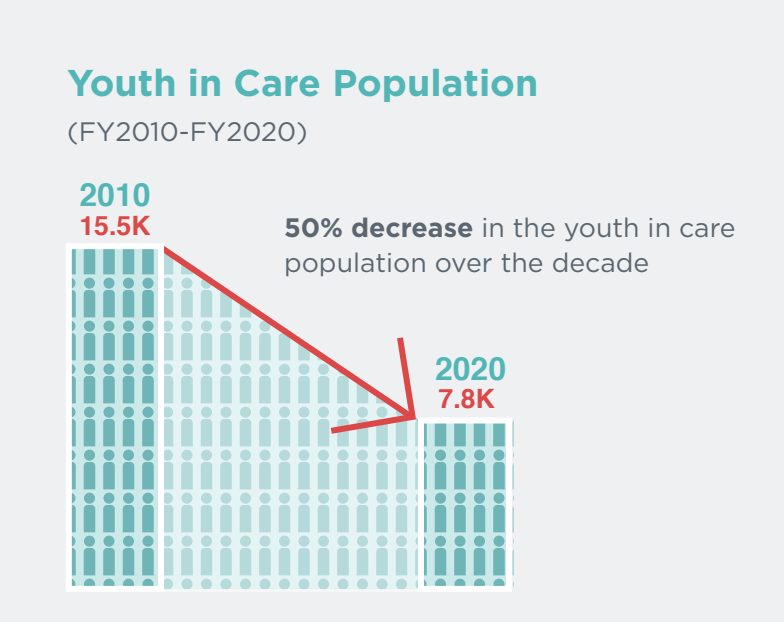
*51 young adults were still engaged in internships at the time of reporting; as a result, the true rate of completion is likely 80%–83%.

This report illuminates promising practices in place throughout the MIP community, as well as widespread and systemic challenges experienced by many of the participating agencies. Practices and challenges were identified through a comprehensive review of program materials and documentation, conversations with the MIP capacity building team and supporting funders, and interviews with programmatic staff, leadership, mentors, and interns across the 12 agencies. While this is not a formal evaluation, the practices highlighted were cited by program staff and other informants as potential keys to success in ways large (for example, better integrating departments or program staff) and small (for example, staying in touch with interns over time). In this regard, the report draws on the informed "hunches" of experienced and thoughtful program staff working to address the multifaceted needs of young people in foster care.

To date, MIP has provided a structure that has allowed nearly 900 young adults in care to participate in a mentored internship, engage in career and personal development, and build meaningful relationships with adult mentors, supervisors, and program staff. Identification of what seems to work and what obstacles chronically get in the way of program participation or implementation builds a case for continuing, expanding, and institutionalizing programs like MIP that hold promise for moving young people in foster care one step closer to a successful transition to adulthood, the world of work, and self-sufficiency.

YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

IN NEW YORK CITY, THE NUMBER OF YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE HAS DECLINED year over year for the past decade, reaching a historic low of 7,800 at the end of fiscal year 2020.[6] Factors contributing to this decline include increased preventative measures to keep youth out of foster care in the first place and enhanced efforts to reunify young people with their families. The enactment of Local Law 144 in 2016 led to the creation of the Foster Care Interagency Task Force and to the subsequent release, in March 2018, of ACS's *Foster Care Strategic Blueprint*.[7] The report outlines five priority areas and related strategies, including improving the prospects of young adults leaving foster care.[8] A cumulative outcome of these strategies is the reduction, over time, of the number of young people aging out of foster care.

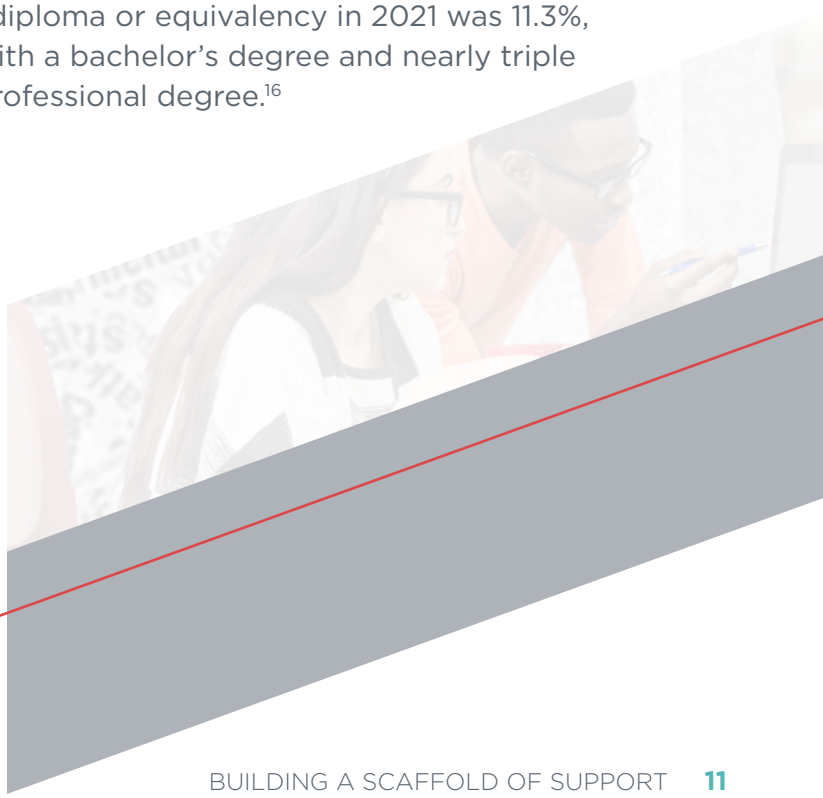


The issue of young adults aging out of foster care has garnered significant attention in recent years. Accordingly, young adults in the foster care system no longer qualify for or are no longer technically eligible for certain services and supports once they reach an age specified by the relevant local or state system—beginning as early as 18 but spanning into the mid-20s in some jurisdictions.[9] In New York City—and likely in many other locales—few systemic mechanisms exist to ensure that young adults aging out of foster care transition to relevant programming and services administered by agencies that work with adults. In the first decade of the new millennium, nearly 1,000 young adults aged out of New York City's foster care system annually;[10] and while this figure fell by nearly half over the following decade,[11] it does not lessen

the urgency to ensure that those young adults are well supported and prepared to embark on adult endeavors, including starting a career.

Smooth transitions, unfortunately, are not always the norm. For example, young people in foster care experienced an average of seven different home placements by the time they aged out of the system, according to a 2011 report.[12] These moves frequently uproot young people from home, school, and social environments, requiring them to rebuild a sense of community and stability anew over and over again. In recent years, ACS has prioritized efforts to decrease the number of moves and other disruptions to the lives of children in foster care, including through an increased focus on placing youth with kin when possible. Even so, the transition to "adulthood" and "independence" can represent yet one more upheaval in the lives of young adults transitioning out of foster care.

The implications of this lack of continuity and continued access to supportive services cannot be overstated. Twenty percent of young adults aging out of foster care in the mid-2000s entered the city's homeless shelter system within three years.[13] A longitudinal study of young adults formerly in foster care in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin found that only half were employed at age 24 and that of those, one-third worked only part time.[14] Of the nearly 1,900 New York City youth in foster care enrolled in high school during the 2020–21 school year, only 50% were on track at the end of the school year to graduate in the standard four years.[15] A higher incidence of unemployment among any adults lacking a high school diploma is well documented, as is the significantly higher unemployment rate throughout the COVID-19 pandemic for this population. Indeed, the unemployment rate for New York City residents lacking a high school diploma or equivalency in 2021 was 11.3%, more than double the rate for residents with a bachelor's degree and nearly triple the rate for residents with a master's or professional degree.[16]



NEW YORK CITY FAIR FUTURES INITIATIVE

Ensuring that youth and young adults in foster care have access to the broad array of supports needed to successfully transition out of foster care requires extensive coordination between multiple agencies and stakeholders. In late 2019, the Fair Futures initiative was launched in New York City as a public-private partnership between the New York City ACS and related city agencies, private philanthropy, foster care agencies and other nonprofit organizations, advocates, and young adults in foster care. This first-of-its-kind endeavor provides youth and young adults in foster care with coaching, academic assistance, career exploration and guidance, and other resources to support the transition to adulthood and independent living. The model is centered on long-term one-on-one and group coaching as youth in care progress from middle school to high school and beyond.

Currently, MIP figures into Fair Futures as one of multiple career development options for young adults in care interested in gaining work experience. As will be detailed later in the report, some of the agencies participating in MIP have taken steps to integrate the program into Fair Futures—for example, by housing MIP in the same department or assigning key staff to work on both initiatives—in an effort to make program recruitment and enrollment more seamless.

For more information on Fair Futures, see **https://www.fairfuturesny.org**.

MENTORED INTERNSHIP PROGRAM MODEL

> **The critical difference is the mentoring piece. Think about our chef who serves as a mentor and provides such discipline and support to the young people. They love having this parental figure who is no nonsense but is caring, and will refer them back to the social worker when needed.**
>
> BILL WEISBERG,
> *executive director of Forestdale*

MIP HAS TWO GOALS: (1) TO PROVIDE JOB READINESS TRAINING FOR participants who lack work-related skills due to a lack of experience and (2) to bind the "non-social-work" staff of the agencies more directly to the mission of serving young people by having them interact with young people in care. MIP in many ways draws on and expands efforts pursued in recent years by participating agencies to host supported internship opportunities for youth in care. For example, in 2000, the Pinkerton Foundation provided funding to the Children's Aid Society to establish an "in house" internship program for its youth in care, which yielded positive outcomes. More recently, in 2014, Sheltering Arms launched a Pinkerton Foundation-supported "in house" internship pilot program. A review of these programs' operations and outcomes revealed the need for dedicated mentor training and support, a signature feature of MIP.

This section provides an overview of MIP's structure, its key programmatic elements, and the capacity building framework in place to support implementation.

MIP INITIATIVE STRUCTURE

Implementing agencies: Twelve of the city's more than two dozen foster care agencies are currently implementing MIP. In addition to general funding from ACS, each agency receives an annual grant from the Pinkerton Foundation to support the MIP coordinator staff role and to subsidize additional program costs. See page 14 for an overview of participating agencies.

Target population: MIP participants are young adults in foster care, ranging in age from 16 to 24. Upon entering the foster care system, these youth are assigned by ACS to one of the city's foster care agencies; they, along with their kin or foster care placement family, receive case management and other services from agency staff.[17] Each agency engages approximately 25 young adults per year in a mentored internship placement. Participants tend to have little or no work experience.

Program staffing: Each agency employs an MIP coordinator, a position described by multiple agencies as "the glue" between interns, mentors and supervisors, a broad array of departments within the agency, and other agencies participating in MIP. Coordinators recruit interns, mentors, and supervisors; provide training and ongoing support to mentors and supervisors; assist in the creation of internship placement scopes of work; facilitate career exploration and readiness workshops for interns; make matches between interns and mentors; work with interns on setting goals and making progress toward identified next steps; and generally create a safe space for interns to troubleshoot their challenges and share experiences. Team composition varies across agencies, but other staff typically involved in MIP programming include program directors, career and employment coaches, and counselors.

Mentored Internship Program: Participating Agencies

Catholic Guardian Services offers an array of services for underserved families and individuals with special needs; creates hope by strengthening and empowering families and individuals in need; and preserves dignity with a faith-based commitment to recognizing the value of each person served.

Children's Aid Society helps children in poverty succeed and thrive by providing comprehensive support to children, youth, and their families in targeted high-needs New York City neighborhoods.

Children's Village works in partnership with families to help society's most vulnerable children become educationally proficient, economically productive, and socially responsible members of their communities.

Forestdale ensures that children and families have the fundamental assets needed to thrive and live independently and that children and families learn, love, and laugh.

Good Shepherd Services partners and grows with communities so that all New York City children, youth, and families succeed and thrive.

Graham Windham strives to make a life-altering difference with children, youth, and families who are overcoming some of life's most difficult challenges and obstacles, by helping build a strong foundation for life: a safe, loving, permanent family and the opportunity and preparation to thrive in school and in the world.

HeartShare St. Vincent's Services works to equalize opportunities for those most in need.

JCCA provides high-quality child welfare and mental health services to New York's neediest and most vulnerable children and families to ensure that they enjoy a life of stability and promise.

The New York Foundling helps children, youth, adults, and families in need through services, supports, and advocacy that strengthen families and communities and help individuals reach their full potential.

Rising Ground provides caring support and proven paths to positive change, helping children, adults, and families rise above adversity.

SCO Family of Services helps New Yorkers build a strong foundation for the future by getting young children off to a good start, launching youth into adulthood, stabilizing and strengthening families, and unlocking potential for children and adults with special needs.

Sheltering Arms Children and Family Services aims to foster a society where every child and family served has the opportunity to succeed and thrive.

CORE PROGRAMMATIC ELEMENTS

Implementation of MIP differs in ways small and large across the 12 participating agencies; however, all agencies incorporate the following elements into their program:

- All participating young adults receive a **paid internship placement within the agency**, ranging in length from 8 to 26 weeks,[18] or a maximum of 240 hours. As a result, interns can earn up to $3,600.[19] Internship wages are covered by an array of sources, including funding from the Work Progress Program (WPP) administered by the Human Resources Administration and the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity, grants intended to cover wages awarded annually to MIP agencies by a group of anonymous donors,[20] general agency funds, and other private donations.
- Interns are **paired with a staff mentor**, ideally someone not typically in contact with youth in foster care. For example, agencies pair interns with mentors from departments such as finance, IT, or development. Mentors are available to provide advice and guidance to young people, aiding in their personal and professional growth.
- An **internship supervisor** focuses on assigning tasks to interns and monitoring their performance throughout the duration of the internship. Some MIP agencies designate separate individuals to serve as supervisor and mentor, while others assign the same staffer both roles.

> **Having a mentor who is not the supervisor—the "mean" person who will yell at them—is important.**
>
> LUANNE BLAAUBOER,
> *director of employment initiatives at Good Shepherd Services*

- MIP takes place in **cohorts**, with a group of youth moving through the program at the same time.
- The program kicks off with **career exploration and work readiness workshops—commonly referred to as Career Club**—usually taking place during the first week before internship placement. Most agencies use the Young Adult Work Opportunities for Rewarding Careers (YAWORC) curriculum in whole or in part (see sidebar on p. 16). Once internships begin, participating young adults continue

to gather weekly or on a regular basis to share their experiences and continue building work readiness skills.

- The cohort format and regular cadence of group meetings and workshops contribute to the objectives of fostering **peer learning and network building** among the young adults involved.
- In addition to group workshops, interns participate in **one-on-one career counseling and planning** throughout the duration of the program. These meetings sometimes include the internship supervisor or mentor.
- MIP coordinators and other agency staff work with interns during and after the program to set career, education, and personal goals and to **connect them with next steps** related to those goals.

YOUNG ADULT WORK OPPORTUNITIES FOR REWARDING CAREERS

Agencies implementing MIP engage interns in an initial period of program orientation and career readiness training, in part to establish expectations for participation and to inform matches of interns with specific departments, supervisors, or mentors. Most agencies participating in MIP use the YAWORC curriculum, developed by the Workplace Center at Columbia University, during program orientation and throughout the duration of MIP. This strengths-based, evidence-informed curriculum engages young adults in goal setting, career exploration, and skill development relevant to the internship they are pursuing. The curriculum is designed to bring interns together as a community to reflect, problem solve, and continue developing their personal and career goals.

For more information on YAWORC, see **https://workplacecenter.columbia.edu/content/current-recent-projects**.

Program metrics: In addition to tracking internship enrollment and completion data, agencies make efforts to monitor young adults' post-internship career and education outcomes. Emphasis on particular "next steps" taken by participating young adults varies from agency to agency but includes the following: participating in the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP); securing employment, either at the foster care agency or with a local business; continuing or enrolling in an educational program (e.g., high school, GED preparation, or college); seeking an occupational skills credential (e.g., A+ certification in the tech industry, or a certified nursing assistant certification); or enlisting in the military. Programs also keep track of and report the number of mentors participating in the program, including the number of those who serve as a mentor more than once.

2021 YOUTH EXPERIENCE SURVEY

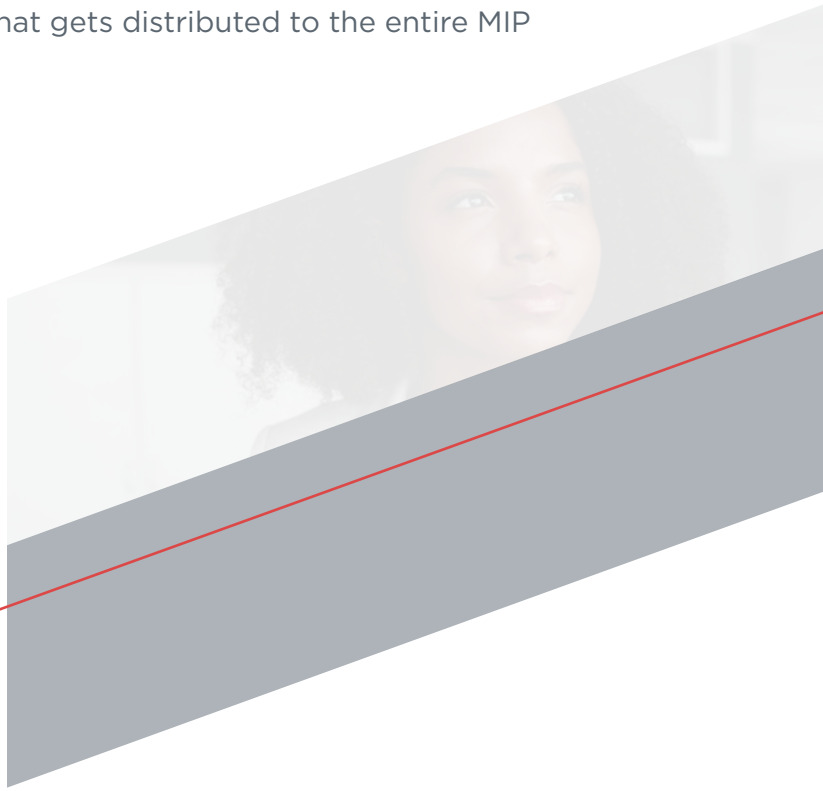
The New York City ACS administers an annual Youth Experience Survey to youth in foster care aged 13–20, posing questions about education, employment, and connections to family and friends, among other topics.[21] The vast majority of respondents want to work; two-thirds of respondents to the 2021 survey indicated an interest in finding employment, and 15% were working at the time of the survey. The top three needs for assistance included finding employment opportunities (79% of those working or interested in work), honing interviewing skills (74%), and completing job applications (73%). Of particular relevance to MIP, 65% expressed a need for help gathering required documentation for employment. For nearly all categories of assistance, a majority of those seeking help received it; just under half of respondents in need of help finding open positions, however, reported success on this front.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND LEARNING COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

To support agencies in their implementation of MIP, a scaffolding of ongoing technical assistance, capacity building, and community-building activities were put in place from the start of the initiative. Led by the Workforce Professionals Training Institute in partnership with Youth Development Institute and Youth Communication, the MIP capacity building team brings together local and national expertise in positive youth development, program design and implementation, and community building (see sidebar on p. 20 for more information on partners). Key pillars of the capacity building component include the following:[22]

- **Leadership roundtable:** Prior to the launch of MIP, the Pinkerton Foundation convened leadership from a subset of the city's foster care agencies to share MIP's concept and solicit input on what those agencies would need to implement the program. These meetings built agency buy-in for MIP, informed program elements, and shaped the capacity building infrastructure that continues to support the agencies and overall initiative.
- **Needs assessment:** Conducted in advance of agencies' participation, the needs assessment aided the capacity building team in identifying agency goals for participating in MIP, initiative-wide and agency-specific capacity building needs, and topics of interest to inform the Learning Community and technical assistance activities.
- **Learning Community:** Agency stakeholders come together as a group roughly once per month to learn, share, test new ideas, and collaborate in a safe and reflective space. The Learning Community is intended to build relationships among MIP agencies and serve as a forum for discussion, collective brainstorming and problem-solving, and validation of the sometimes challenging work involved in implementing MIP. The Learning Community also serves as a source of professional development where staff can gain new skills and demonstrate leadership in their respective agencies. Meeting topics are informed by the needs assessments, technical assistance sessions, and themes arising throughout Learning Community sessions.
- **Individualized technical assistance:** MIP agencies have access to individualized technical assistance from the capacity building team on an as-needed basis. Thus far, the focus of technical assistance has been to provide MIP coordinators with individualized coaching, facilitate mentor-mentee orientation mixers, and advise on program structure.

- **Tools and frameworks developed or adapted for MIP:** The team draws on evidence-based frameworks and approaches to inform its guidance provided to MIP agencies. The All Youth – One System framework devised by New Ways to Work[23] underlies MIP's youth development orientation, and the *Work-Based Learning Toolkit*, created by the Workforce Professionals Training Institute and New Ways to Work,[24] provides step-by-step guidance on running an in-house internship for young people. Further, nearly all of the agencies use the YAWORC curriculum, developed by the Workplace Center at Columbia University.
- **MIP Boot Camp:** Building on early implementation experiences and learnings during the first year, the capacity building team developed the MIP Boot Camp to onboard new agencies and prepare them for integration into the ongoing Learning Community. Veteran MIP coordinators participate in the Boot Camp, sharing their insights, strategies, and experiences with staff from agencies newer to the program.
- **MIP University:** Emerging from the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic and input from MIP coordinators, MIP University was created to provide interns virtual access to professional development workshops. The offerings supplement career readiness and skill-building workshops offered by each agency; for example, a recent module focused on careers in healthcare resulted in multiple young adults enrolling in a certification program to become certified nursing assistants. Additionally, participating young people play an integral role in creating MIP's quarterly newsletter—for example, by authoring articles or participating in interviews about career development—that gets distributed to the entire MIP community.



MENTORED INTERNSHIP PROGRAM'S CAPACITY BUILDING TEAM

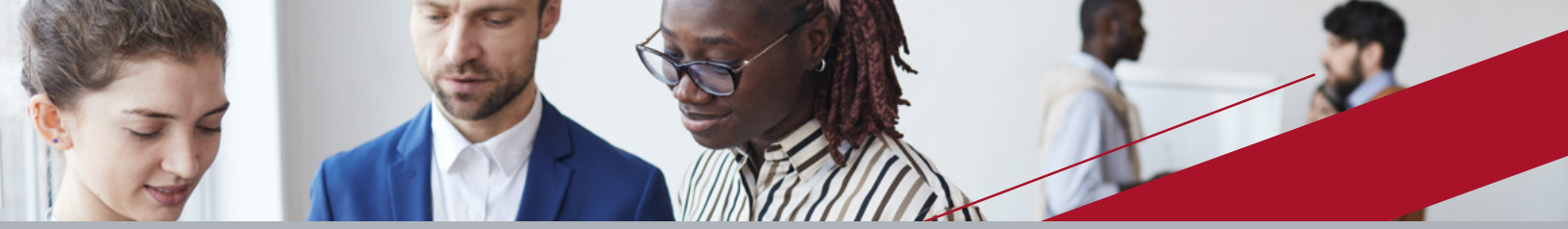
The MIP capacity building team comprises three New York City-based organizations that collectively bring vast expertise and experience in workforce and youth development, program design and implementation, and development of communities of practice among social service providers.

Workforce Professionals Training Institute increases the effectiveness of people, programs, and organizations that are committed to generating pathways out of poverty through employment.

Youth Development Institute at Ramapo for Children provides capacity building assistance to youth-serving organizations across the nonprofit sector to help them deliver high-quality programming for young people and enhance the systems that help youth transition successfully into adulthood.

Youth Communication provides powerful, teen-written stories and professional development to help educators and youth workers engage young people.

MIP and organizational culture change: As stated above, one of MIP's objectives is to seed and begin to realize shifts in each agency's culture as a result of putting more staff in contact with program interns. By positioning staff from across an agency as mentors to youth in foster care, MIP seeks to inspire these individuals to change their perspectives about youth in foster care and to cultivate greater empathy and support for youth in care within departments and across agencies. The capacity building and Learning Community supports are a critical strategy for supporting agencies in their efforts to work toward organizational culture change in this regard.



MENTORED INTERNSHIP PROGRAM PROMISING PRACTICES

FOUR YEARS INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MIP, THE AGENCIES, CAPACITY building team, funders, and other stakeholders have accumulated valuable experience, insights from programmatic shifts, and a growing body of data to inform future programming. This section highlights promising practices emerging across participating agencies.

PROGRAM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Program Recruitment and Enrollment

Drawing on program alumni to spread the word about MIP and share their experiences with peers: It is not unusual for program recruitment efforts to rely on word of mouth—particularly from past program participants. SCO Family of Services' former career readiness and MIP coordinator Mark McCaskill commented, "I believe our alumni are a secret weapon; they refer lots of their peers to MIP and share what they've learned." Program alumni can serve as "credible messengers" to their peers, providing real and first-hand perspectives on the ins and outs and ups and downs of interning at a given agency and making use of the mentoring, peer, and other supports available through MIP. Furthermore, tapping alumni for recruitment efforts aligns well with conscious efforts cited by multiple agencies to better incorporate youth voice into program and agency operations.

Making use of social media to connect with and stay in touch with young adults: Connecting with and staying in touch with young people can prove challenging for any youth-focused agency, including those involved in MIP. HeartShare St. Vincent's Services captures the social media handles of young people in care and frequently uses platforms such as TikTok and Instagram to share information and to personally message users. Whereas it is not unusual for young adults to change their phone numbers and email addresses, they are less likely to change or close their social

media accounts. In the experience of HeartShare staff, young people are also more likely to check social media accounts than their email or phone messages.

Gathering required documentation as soon as possible: Because young adults participating in MIP are put on an agency's payroll, they must go through the same or a similar hiring process as new full-time employees. This means that they must complete a comprehensive set of paperwork and provide documents like state-issued identification (e.g., driver's license) and documentation of prior residential addresses—a requirement that can create barriers for many young people wishing to participate in the program.

Several participating agencies have taken steps to mitigate this challenge. For example, the New York Foundling's MIP coordinator maintains a waiting list for young adults interested in MIP but in need of key documents. She holds an initial conversation with interested candidates to assess their documentation status and create a plan of action for gathering needed items. If a new cohort begins while a young person is still gathering documents, the process continues to ensure that he or she is ready for the next cohort. Similarly, HeartShare St. Vincent's Services enlists program staff to jumpstart the documentation-gathering process in advance of the program start date. It has instituted a rolling clearance process that compiles documentation for youth who have expressed an interest in and fit for MIP right away rather than waiting until the targeted start date for the internship. Meanwhile, Graham Windham's MIP coordinator, with support from the agency's success supervisor, has made a point of partnering with the human resources department to address chronic documentation challenges. Staff now refer to a documentation checklist when meeting with prospective interns and make use of tools such as DocuSign to expedite the recruitment and information-gathering process. The agency's success supervisor, Gwen Vargas, reflected, "We know we have to abide by certain federal guidelines, but human resources has tried to remove barriers."

Supervisor and Mentor Recruitment

Leaning on executive messaging and behavior to recruit supervisors and mentors: MIP's success, in part, requires involvement or at least support on the part of executive leadership; absent this, the "culture change" objective of the program is unlikely to occur. MIP staff from an array of agencies have noted the importance of executive leadership modeling behavior by serving as mentors. JCCA's CEO, for example, is "always the first person to volunteer as a mentor," setting a valuable example for others in leadership positions and throughout the organization. Executive leadership at many agencies engage in some degree of "voluntelling" staff and departments to become involved. When MIP launched at Catholic Guardian Services, communication from the chief program officer, Caryn Ashare, was sent

to staff conveying the message, "this is what's happening and we're supporting this," which was important for setting the tone from the executive level. She took on an intern, leading by example. Similarly, Forestdale's director of Strong Futures knows that if she asks a colleague to take on an intern, that request is understood as coming from the executive director.

Working to reduce apprehension or fear of the time commitment: Mentors and supervisors often require some mentoring themselves. Serving as a mentor or supervisor to a young person likely lacking formal work experience and from a different background can seem like a daunting undertaking. Catholic Guardian Services' former Journey Program coach supervisor, Cashay Haffoney, said it was not unusual for prospective mentors to ask questions such as, "Are you matching me up with a young person who will be problematic or unprofessional?" And, as Sheltering Arms Children and Family Services' executive director noted, staff from departments

YOUTH COMMUNICATION STORYTELLING

Youth Communication facilitates workshops for mentors and mentees that involve reading a story together and engaging in discussion. A recent selection, for example, is a true story called, "Finally, a Work Role Model," about a youth in foster care who cannot decide what she wants to pursue as a career and has no adult role models. Young people usually relate well to the stories, especially those about youth in foster care, and mentors have an opportunity to gain perspective on some of the decisions, dilemmas, and thoughts their mentee might be experiencing. Discussion questions are embedded in the story and are designed to get mentors and mentees to reflect on their own interactions with each other. For example, "If you were in this situation, what would you want your mentor to say to you?" Or "What would you say to your mentee in this situation?"

like development, who at the agency are predominantly white and highly educated, commonly expressed concern that they would not be viewed as relatable or credible mentors.

All agencies employ an array of mechanisms for supporting and checking in with supervisors and mentors, including regularly scheduled meetings and trainings, one-on-one conversations, and surveys administered during and after the internship. MIP coordinators, in particular, play a critical role in supporting course corrections or flagging potential issues. Sheltering Arms uses group meetings among mentors and supervisors to jointly work through issues likely to arise during the course of an internship. One example includes walking through how one might respond to an intern who calls in sick at the last minute, with discussion focused on how the response should be consistent with or different from that for a full-time employee. A common practice instituted across agencies involves hosting an orientation and mixer event for mentors and interns at the start of each cohort. In addition to providing a setting for socializing and team building, this orientation offers a way to dispel the fears of new mentors and provide a first-hand look at what is involved and expected.

> **It's revealing to [prospective mentors] to know that they can model their talents and skills, allowing them to do real mentoring that might be less possible with a random pairing.**
>
> KRISTEN RAGUSA,
> *vice president of youth success at Graham Windham*

Making Intern-Mentor Matches

Starting with intern aspirations and goal setting to target mentor outreach and commitments: Matching an intern to a particular role or department and ensuring a good match between intern, supervisor, and mentor requires a mix of creativity and analysis. Nearly all agencies have some level of up-front, individualized engagement with interns to get to know their personalities, aspirations, motivations for participating, and potential challenges in a workplace setting. In some cases,

these conversations are aided with tools such as the YAWORC Exploring Career Interests assessment. Information gleaned through assessments and conversations with interns can also be used to conduct targeted recruitment of mentors. Catholic Guardian Services, for example, appealed to the mailroom supervisor to serve as a mentor to a young man who aspired to become a postal worker. Absent the insights gleaned from the intern on his aspirations, direct outreach to this department would likely not have occurred.

Using intern growth areas—combined with an assessment of available support—to make matches: The assessment tools used by most agencies implementing MIP, including YAWORC, establish a baseline of a given individual's existing skills, competencies, strengths, and growth areas. Using the internship, with its built-in support systems and "cushions" for inexperience, as a way to address growth areas can serve as an effective strategy for identifying a departmental placement and mentor match. Sheltering Arms Children and Family Services, for example, cited an example of assigning a particularly shy intern to a front-desk position, requiring him to work with his mentor to develop skills and strategies to perform his job. Other agencies shared similar stories, highlighting the importance of ensuring that their interns' supervisors and mentors were prepared and able to provide the necessary support for positions that were likely to prove challenging but ultimately facilitate growth.

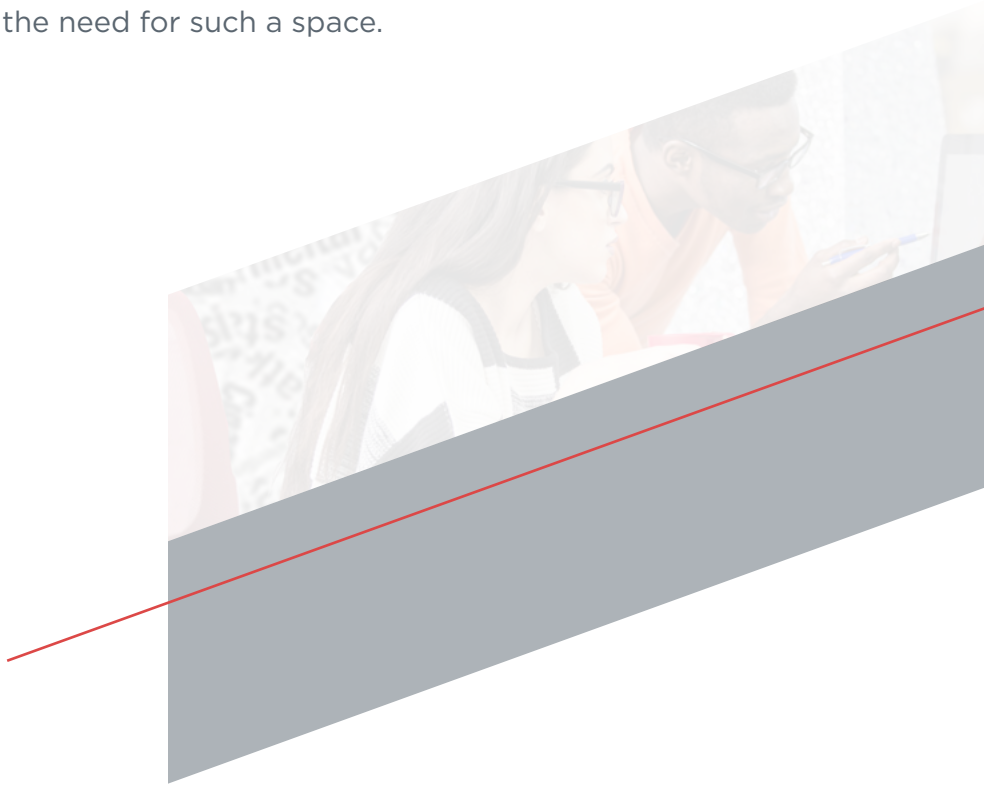
Creating detailed job descriptions to aid the matching process: One aspect that makes for successful internships, as reported by MIP coordinators, is the development of detailed job descriptions outlining the roles for and expectations of interns. Graham Windham's MIP coordinator, for example, provides prospective supervisors and mentors with a template for developing an intern's job description. This information serves as yet another tool for ensuring that interns are well matched to departments, roles, supervisors, and mentors, as well as for ensuring some consistency in the quality and scope of internships from cohort to cohort.

Establishing an Intern's Scope of Work

Placing equal importance and emphasis on the performance of concrete tasks and the development of critical skills: Scoping out the day-to-day tasks and objectives of an internship can fuel apprehension on the part of supervisors and mentors. Graham Windham's employment success coordinator, Julia Lindsey, reflected, "At the beginning it can be hard for mentors to break down tasks for interns. We don't always pay attention to how and what we're doing." This acknowledgment has informed the agency's approach to communicating about the internship opportunity and providing ongoing support to supervisors and mentors. Graham Windham's

MIP coordinator shares, where possible, suggestions on the types of skills that a supervisor might focus on developing in an intern. If she notices an intern struggling with Excel during work readiness sessions, for example, she flags this as a potential area of focus during the internship. To balance out the practical skills used and honed during an internship, MIP coordinators across the agencies advise program mentors to incorporate conversations about career pathways and personal journeys into the day, or carve out time for the intern to conduct research or speak with other staff about their experiences.

Building in some flexibility for interns to exercise creativity and problem-solving skills—and creating a forum for sharing the outputs: Multiple agencies have benefitted from innovations pioneered by interns. These came about through a combination of placing interns in positions that leverage their skills and interests, and creating some space for creativity, innovative thinking, and problem-solving within the internship. An intern in Graham Windham's mental health clinic, for example, reviewed feedback from the facility's suggestion box and advocated for providing magazines and coloring books in the waiting area. SCO Family of Services cited an example of tasking one intern with artistic and design skills to create virtual backgrounds that are now used by staff across the agency. And interns at Good Shepherd Services advocated for the creation of lactation rooms for staff and clients after gathering information on the need for such a space.



COVID-ERA ADAPTATIONS AND STRATEGIES

The COVID-19 pandemic required MIP agencies to shift strategies and adopt new practices better suited to the realities of remote work and school, social distancing, and other issues impacting young people in foster care. Examples of some of those shifts include the following:

MIP coordinators serving as supervisors: During the COVID-19 pandemic, MIP coordinators at some agencies served as supervisors, in large part because administrative staff were working remotely and unable to fill the supervisory role for interns.

Shifting away from cohort-based enrollment: To provide additional flexibility in the midst of remote work and other pandemic-related changes, some agencies moved away from running MIP in cohorts. The New York Foundling, for example, shifted to continuous intern onboarding in mid-2021 in lieu of running discrete cohorts. This change was pursued to maximize the number of internship slots in recognition of how the pandemic-related shift to remote work for many administrative staff necessitated a more flexible approach to scheduling.

Tapping select MIP alumni as mentors: One strategy explored by a few agencies during the past year or two of the pandemic involves enlisting select MIP program alumni as mentors. Sheltering Arms Children and Family Services is experimenting with this strategy and has found value in enlisting alumni to share their insights and provide peer support.

Group and peer mentoring: To address challenges in recruiting enough mentors willing and able to play this role in a virtual environment, some agencies have experimented with group mentoring strategies. Forestdale, for example, began assigning one mentor to three interns early in the pandemic; this approach addresses mentor shortages and provides an added benefit of establishing peer "pods" for interns that can address issues of social isolation.

Shifting work readiness programming and internships to a virtual setting: Multiple agencies adapted the YAWORC curriculum to a virtual setting, and many internships also took place remotely during the initial months of the pandemic. Staff at Children's Village pointed out that the shift to virtual programming made it possible for some particularly disconnected young adults to participate in the program, a positive side effect. Similarly, some staff were more open to serving as mentors in a virtual rather than in-person capacity.

Program Design

Making space in the program for youth voice and input: Many agencies working with youth in foster care strive to build youth voice into their programming, in line with commonly held principles of youth development. Examples of what this looks like in the context of MIP abound. Good Shepherd Services, for example, has found that seeking input from the interns on how the program is run instills a stronger sense of ownership and belonging, translating into better retention of interns, as well as sustained relationships beyond the internship. And SCO Family of Services emphasizes the importance of creating a peer support network in the context of MIP and holding staff to the same expectations as interns; for example, staff are also expected to share real-life experiences and reflect on how they have changed in response. "This allows the relationships to continue to build and doesn't feel like another part of school, but more like an open conversation or dialogue," according to Mark McCaskill, former career readiness and MIP coordinator. Finally, a few agencies have relied on feedback from interns to make changes in the length of the program; Sheltering Arms Children and Family Services and HeartShare St. Vincent's Services have both extended the length of their internships, while Forestdale has shortened its program, based on input from interns.

Building and broadening interns' social and professional networks in the course of preparing them for their next steps: MIP represents one important step—often the first step—in a young adult's career journey. Beyond the fundamentals highlighted above, one strategy for preparing interns involves putting them in contact, either as a group or individually, with professionals working in their occupation or field of interest. Sheltering Arms Children and Family Services' executive director, Elizabeth McCarthy, reflected, "It is important for young people to understand that not everyone has the same journey to get where they are; personal stories are useful for conveying this." The New York Foundling, for example, connects interns to professionals in their field of interest to conduct informational interviews. Staff make an effort to identify professionals of color, which helps the interns feel like "if they can do this job, so can I." It is not unusual for these interviews to lead to longer-term relationships.

Making space for interns to build their own peer networks during and beyond the program: Cohort-based programming provides opportunities for participants to learn not just from instructors, mentors, or others involved in running or contributing to a program, but also from one another. At the New York Foundling, one cohort in particular built strong bonds with one another during the program. Staff witnessed how cohort members held one another accountable for working toward shared goals and showing up for group sessions. Perhaps as a result, this cohort completed

more internship hours on average than previous cohorts. Good Shepherd Services builds community service activities into MIP as a way to create bonds among cohort members, which has correlated with higher program retention and completion rates.

The peer networks that form during MIP endure beyond the program and can leverage the experience of program alumni as "near peers" to new participants. The New York Founding has created a "Mentored Internship Program ambassador" position for a few alums; these young people provide peer support to new interns and remain associated with the program. HeartShare St. Vincent's Services enlists MIP alumni to recruit new interns, providing an incentive for each person recruited. SCO Family of Services recently launched an alumni network that brings young people together on a quarterly basis, provides them with opportunities to mentor new interns, and serves as a forum for sharing career-related information.

PROGRAM INTEGRATION AND CULTURE CHANGE

> **It has become part of the fabric of the agency to see a mentored intern walking the hallways [of the administrative offices] with a folder in hand on their way to a meeting or to make a photocopy.**
>
> HEARTSHARE ST. VINCENT'S SERVICES,
> *fiscal year 2020 grant report*

Integrating MIP into the Agency

Housing MIP program staff and administration within a department responsible for related programming: Silos exist in agencies large and small, sometimes by design but also through patterns of operation that become engrained over time. Multiple agencies participating in MIP have noted shifts over time in where the program is housed, often in an effort to foster better communication among staff, align complementary programs, or leverage resources. As Children Aid Society's executive vice president, Georgia Boothe, commented, "Children's Aid Society is a big place and can be siloed; MIP has helped break some of that down. There was a new understanding of what various departments do. That has been powerful." These

types of shifts have coincided with an increased emphasis system-wide on ensuring that youth in care have access to career and education services, which are viewed as essential to preparing for the transition out of foster care. Rising Ground underwent an evolution in its approach over time, with MIP initially operating largely on its own. The program is now more integrated within the organization, with the pandemic yielding new opportunities—and necessities—to operate in a more aligned manner across departments and programs.

The launch of Fair Futures in 2018 across New York City's network of foster care agencies has prompted some agencies to make changes to their organizational structure and operations to the benefit of MIP (see Fair Futures sidebar on p. 11). For example, SCO Family of Services houses MIP, Fair Futures, and other similar programs under its Education and Permanency Support Program, making it "easier to recruit, to share information more efficiently on the program, and better target efforts." Similarly, Catholic Guardian Services has restructured by putting the Fair Futures initiative and its career development, education, and housing programs under the Journey Program umbrella.

Including other staff responsible for working with interns in MIP planning, check-ins, and operations: Restructuring departments, as described above, is an important first step toward engaging youth in care in a more holistic manner; integrating staff from related departments and programs into the implementation of programs like MIP is also critical to implementing an integrated strategy. Graham Windham's employment success coordinator, Julia Lindsey, reflected on the agency's approach, stating, "Coaches recognize that youth need career and college specialists to work with. We communicate across the positions and make sure follow up is taking place—it is a real team effort." The New York Foundling's strategy for retaining interns in the program involves cultivating relationships between the internship coordinator and the mentors, supervisors, and case planners; involving case planners is critical to ensuring that barriers do not keep interns from successfully participating in and completing the internship.

Integrating MIP Interns into the Agency

Using internships to broaden the perspectives of agency staff: A common reflection across agencies is that youth in foster care typically interact with the agency in very specific, prescribed contexts; they are not necessarily exposed to what the agency does beyond those interactions. The same goes for staff in some departments of foster care agencies. Catholic Guardian Services, for example, is a large agency with multiple locations, including a Midtown headquarters office that houses the executive offices, fiscal, and human resources departments. MIP

staff had to work to change perceptions and culture in the headquarters office to accommodate young adult interns. Many didn't think they could make the changes initially. Carla Covington, director of Catholic Guardian's Journey Program, said that a common initial reaction to the prospect of taking on an intern fell along the lines of, "We don't know if we can have a young adult sorting our interoffice mail, answering our phones in reception, or working with one of our unit assistants."

MIP presents multiple opportunities to better integrate young people in care into the day-to-day operations of an agency, providing them with exposure to a professional environment while at the same time exposing agency professionals to youth in care. HeartShare St. Vincent Service's associate vice president for strategic workforce initiatives, Jermaine Smith, reflected, "When MIP first started, there was not a culture that would make youth feel comfortable coming to the main location … [Over time] we were able to develop the culture of working as well as a culture of them feeling comfortable coming into the admin office." Catholic Guardian Services' chief program officer, Caryn Ashare, echoed her colleague's assessment, noting, "We as an agency had to come together to support our young people. This has been more or less successful, but a lot of educating needed to happen with some team members."

Integrating interns into agency meetings and events in addition to assigning tasks: Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, multiple agencies used MIP internships as a way to expose young people to day-to-day operations at the agency. Including interns in routine departmental or all-staff meetings, for example, provides them with a first-hand view of issues impacting the agency, interpersonal interactions, and decision-making processes. Sheltering Arms Children and Family Services regularly assigns interns to assist with the annual gala event, providing them with an eye-opening perspective on the agency's full scope of work and array of supporters. Interns assigned to an agency's executive office, in particular, end up attending multiple staff, strategy, and even partner meetings during the course of their internships, witnessing first-hand the ins and outs of operating an organization.

We have had some cohorts where the youth really feel part of the staff community, to the point we've had to slow them down; "No, you can't have keys." We keep them feeling accepted, which helps to create the community.

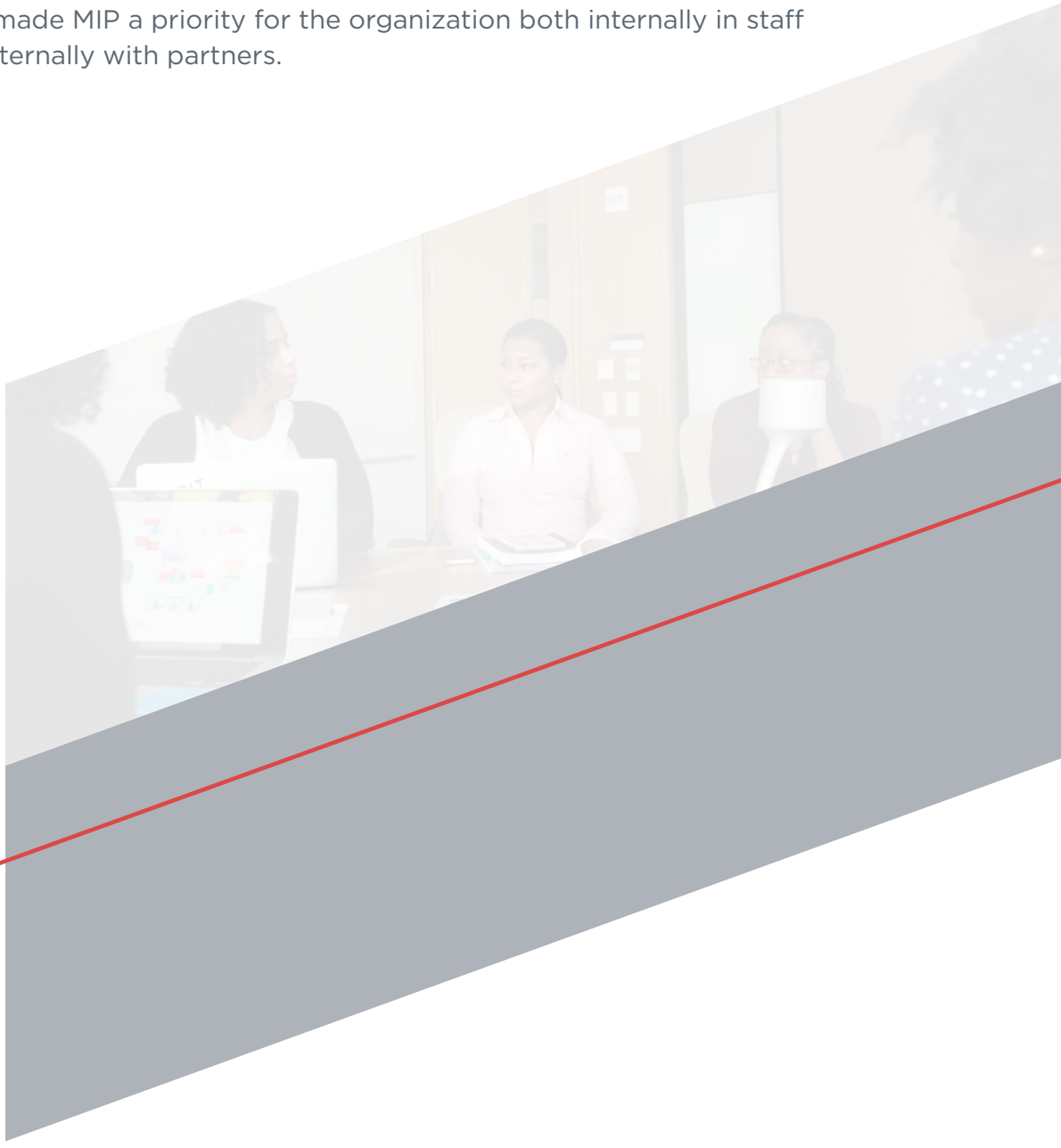
ATIYAH GORDON,
MIP coordinator at Children's Village

Seeding and Achieving Culture Shifts within the Agency

Acknowledging the cumulative and catalytic power of shifting perceptions over time: Changes in organization infrastructure or operations do not guarantee but can catalyze parallel shifts in behavior or culture. Various informants reflected on the shifts in perception on the part of agency staff relative to youth in care. Working with interns made apparent some of the implicit biases commonly held about youth in care, even on the part of agency staff. HeartShare St. Vincent's Services employment coach, Debbie Pierre, reflected, "This program has helped to deconstruct many preconceptions about youth in foster care. Although there are some issues with time management, overall, our interns were evaluated to have performed either at, or approaching entry level. We credit this change in culture to our belief that in order for mentors to change how they view interns, the interns need to be validated as viable members of the workforce." A similar realization for Catholic Guardian Services informed the agency's approach to recruiting and preparing mentors for their role. As the executive director of Sheltering Arms Children and Family Services, Elizabeth McCarthy, aptly expressed, "Part of it is making our staff, many of whom are parents, think back to what they needed at 18. It's useful to remind people they weren't fully independent at 21 and likely needed assistance in some way."

Perceptions on the part of staff across agencies implementing MIP are shifting in ways subtle and substantial. JCCA's director of the Leadership Education Achievement Pathways program remarked that it is now not unusual for staff to approach her at all-staff meetings to make sure that an intern is connected to a specific service or program. Moreover, the New York Foundling staff are building in more and varied forms of communication with parents, foster parents, and guardians of MIP interns to ensure that they understand and support the schedule, goals, and outcomes of young people in the program. And Catholic Guardian Services staff perceive shifts in language, with more team members adopting a unified vision of "us" as opposed to the more traditional designations of "us"—the professionals—and "them"—the youth. It is worth emphasizing the critical role that MIP coordinators play in recruiting, orienting, coaching, encouraging, and otherwise supporting mentors throughout their engagement in the program.

Not underestimating the power of executive messaging and support: Just as executive messaging has been shown to impact participation in MIP on the part of agency staff, it is also proving critical to ushering in the types of culture and programmatic shifts envisioned as a result of implementing the MIP model. Phoebe Boyer, CEO of Children's Aid Society, reflected, "We came to MIP with great enthusiasm; developmentally, this is what we want for our kids … [It is] an opportunity to connect with our mission in a really tangible way and bring a more united approach to what we're trying to do." SCO Family of Services' president and CEO Keith Little takes the lead in raising awareness about MIP across the organization. The high visibility of the initiative has led to significant referrals and interest. He has made MIP a priority for the organization both internally in staff meetings and externally with partners.



MENTORED INTERNSHIP PROGRAM: SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

FOSTER CARE AGENCIES IMPLEMENTING MIP HAVE GAINED VALUABLE experience, experimented with and honed new strategies, made programmatic and organizational changes, and evolved both practice and perspective over the past few years, as documented in the previous section. These agencies have also encountered some shared barriers and challenges, ones with systemic rather than organizational roots. The review of documentation and interviews with agency and initiative stakeholders surfaced a few key systemic issues that require collaborative approaches to address.

Employment documentation: As noted earlier, most agencies participating in MIP pay interns wages rather than a stipend, with the bulk of those wages paid through the city-funded WPP. Paying an intern a wage necessitates putting that individual on the agency's payroll and collecting documentation required for employment. Gathering this type of information for a young adult in foster care can pose logistical and emotional challenges. For example, a young adult in care might not have access to his or her birth certificate or Social Security card, necessitating legwork on the part of the foster care agency to file requests before the relevant agencies. In addition, constant mobility for some foster care youth makes it difficult to provide a comprehensive history of prior addresses that is required in some agency employment applications. And the act of engaging relatives or others with whom a young person may be estranged from or experienced trauma at the hands of can pose a significant emotional burden.

The documentation required for MIP participation holds value beyond the internship; these young adults are likely to need essential personal paperwork to apply for educational programs, other internships (including SYEP), unsubsidized employment, loans, leases, or bank accounts. Implementing MIP, however, has shed light on the challenge in part because program staff have taken on the burden of gathering this documentation with internship—and payroll—start dates looming. Missing paperwork means that an intern cannot get paid, or requires an alternative arrangement for payment, such as a stipend.

Funding of internship wages: Agencies participating in MIP draw on multiple funding sources to cover the wages paid to interns,[25] including WPP, small grants from a group of anonymous donors supportive of MIP, and other funding streams cultivated by individual agencies. Wages are covered through a patchwork approach, often with last-minute efforts to nail down the details.

WPP covers internship wages for the majority of interns participating in MIP. This funding source comes with some eligibility restrictions; for example, young adults enrolled in college full time are not eligible for WPP-supported wages, nor are undocumented young adults. Agencies applying for WPP slots are not guaranteed to receive their full request, especially if they have a record of requesting more slots than get used. Further, award decisions do not always coincide with the timing of cohort cycles, leaving some agencies to scramble at the last minute to secure alternative funding sources to cover internship wages. The WPP funding source is viewed as valuable but costly to administer given its reporting requirements and lack of an administrative allowance accompanying the award.[26]

While no agency has indicated that internship wage funding is an insurmountable problem, the last-minute settling of wage sources informed in part by intern characteristics or statuses poses challenges for the program's sustainability and scalability.

MIP recruitment "supply": MIP targets a rather specific population in terms of age, foster care status, and barriers to self-sufficiency. New York City's foster care population has declined significantly over the past decade, in part due to more proactive strategies to prevent family separations. As time passes, some agencies note a paradox: the pool of young people eligible for MIP has shrunk through a combination of a limited supply and prior participation by members of the target population. While few would wish for a larger supply of eligible applicants, the reality does pose challenges—as well as opportunities—for the continuation of MIP.

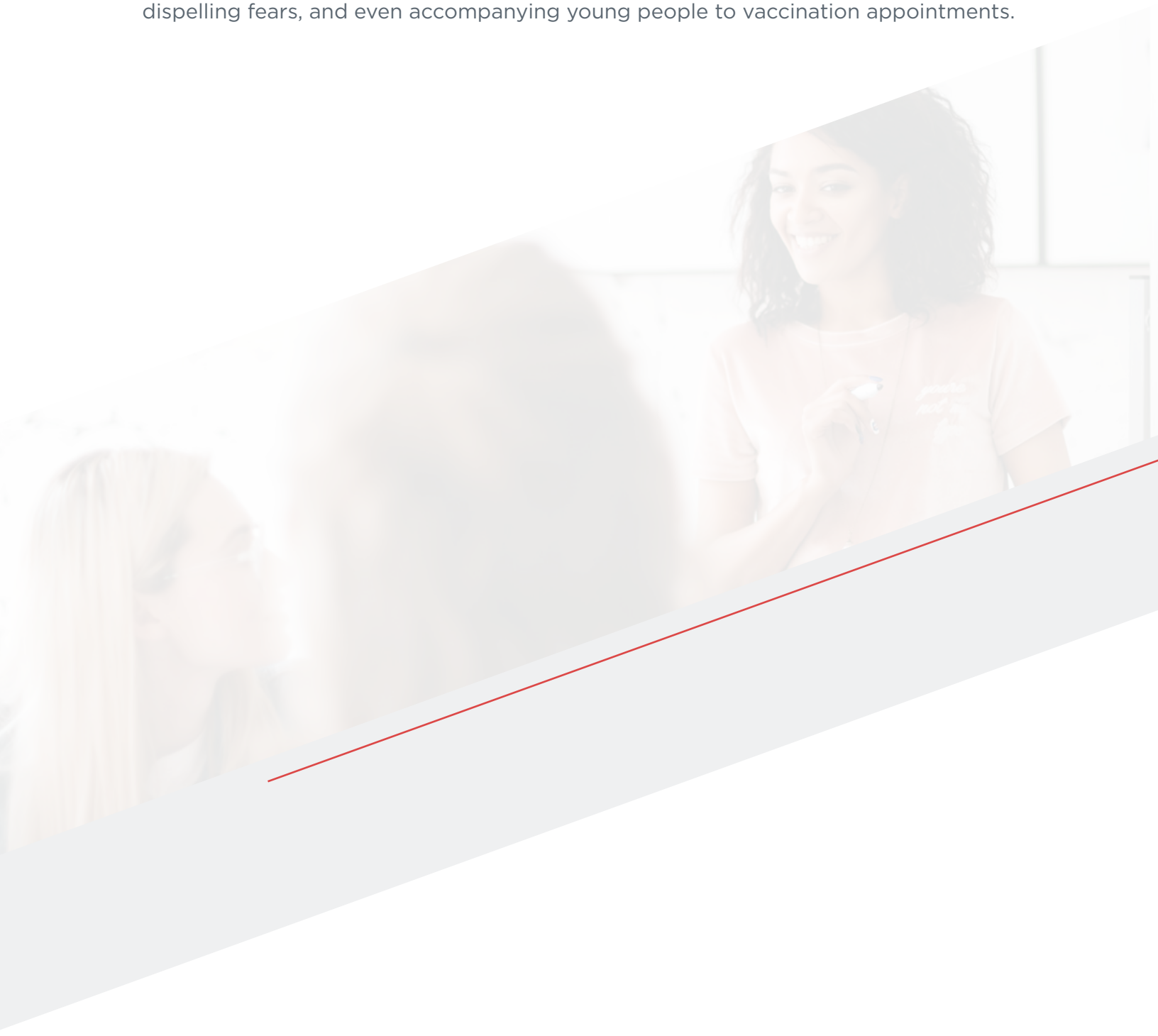
Agency staff from some organizations note that the pool of eligible young adults now contains individuals with more significant barriers to participation or little interest in participating; those who were interested or could be convinced have already participated. While the remaining pool in theory could benefit the most from an intervention like MIP, the strategies and staffing required to ensure their continued and successful engagement might exceed current program capacity. Others have noted interest on the part of MIP alumni to participate in a second round of the program, a consideration that some staff felt might be beneficial to specific youth in care to further bolster their employability skills. However, the program as administered, with a significant portion of wages covered through WPP, was not designed for repeat enrollment.

Data collection infrastructure and expectations: MIP's reporting requirements include annual updates on the number of interns enrolled in the program and their completion status, the number of mentors involved, and information on each intern's next steps following completion of the internship. While agencies have not reported difficulty adhering to these expectations around internship reporting, not all of them are set up to comprehensively collect information on next steps immediately following MIP, much less at longer intervals of time (e.g., six months or one year out). The data collected to date point to the promise of the model; expansion or moving the program out of pilot status, though, will require more robust and rigorous data collection practices and systems. The implementation of Fair Futures has included the rollout of a data reporting system and expectations; however, this system does not currently incorporate all of the information relevant to MIP, presenting both a challenge and an opportunity.

Building employment-focused capacity: The agencies participating in MIP vary in size and scope, with some providing services to a variety of populations beyond youth in foster care. MIP has introduced workforce development and career readiness programming to some of the agencies for the first time, requiring them to build new capacities and expertise directly or through partnership; for others, MIP has presented an opportunity to develop connections that did not exist before between departments to ensure that interns have access to programs such as SYEP. Developing the capacity to effectively engage businesses and prepare jobseekers for employment can prove challenging even for organizations that provide workforce development services as a primary line of business; as a result, foster care agencies pivoting to add workforce development to their portfolio of services face real barriers to entry. As Catholic Guardian Services' chief program officer, Caryn Ashare, commented, "It's not efficient for each of us to develop relationships with employers. It shouldn't be a competition between agencies."

Pandemic-related challenges: Just as the COVID-19 pandemic fueled some creative responses to programmatic shifts (see sidebar on p. 27), it also yielded challenges that have impacted program operations across the MIP agencies. One of the most universal issues encountered revolves around lost momentum for incorporating interns across agency operations. Especially for departments that continue to operate remotely, the rationale for taking on an intern has shifted significantly or makes less sense, and has required agencies to rethink how they structure meaningful work experiences in a virtual environment. As staff start to return to the office, the process of reacclimating teams to in-person work will take precedence over figuring out how to build an intern into operations. Early indications, as of mid-2022, point to some optimism on the part of MIP coordinators about the prospect of reprioritizing a focus on intern integration.

Compliance with vaccine mandates among prospective MIP participants posed another challenge unique to the times, though anecdotally not uncommon among organizations working with populations facing multiple barriers to employment. As a potential testament to the bonds created between agency staff and young people, multiple individuals interviewed for this report told stories of staff investing countless hours in discussing the vaccine with interns, answering questions and dispelling fears, and even accompanying young people to vaccination appointments.



RECOMMENDATIONS

THE PROCESS OF IDENTIFYING PROMISING PRACTICES AND SYSTEMIC challenges has yielded valuable insights on MIP, how it fits into the broader workforce and youth development ecosystems, and the program's potential for continuation and applicability to other populations. This section offers a set of recommendations and considerations regarding MIP.

MIP integration at the organizational level: MIP began as a pilot program at a subset of New York City's foster care agencies and has since become more deeply embedded in the organizational structure of most of those agencies. That MIP's launch coincided with the rollout of Fair Futures very likely shaped the program's integration within its implementing agencies; without Fair Futures, one can imagine that MIP would have continued to function as a stand-alone program at several of the agencies. Integration, however, has not been systematic, and opportunities for better alignment around programming, staffing, data collection, and continuity of services surfaced in the course of interviews for this report. Now is the time for funders and administrators of MIP and Fair Futures to assess how the programs complement each other, can benefit from more direct integration and alignment, and now yield useful guidance for expanding MIP to all foster care agencies in New York City.

MIP integration at the systemic level: An important component of MIP integrated throughout the work readiness program and internships is the focus on identifying next steps, be they enrollment in an educational or training program, seeking unsubsidized employment, enlisting in the military, or gaining additional experience through another internship. Most of New York City's foster care agencies have limited capacity and expertise to comprehensively address this aspect of the program on their own, though many of the agencies involved in MIP have taken steps to build internal capacity on this front.

MIP presents an opportunity to better plug foster care agencies into the workforce development ecosystem, including through partnerships with established workforce programs. Multiple stakeholders have suggested building pathways from MIP into SYEP; every summer, SYEP providers invest considerable efforts in recruiting enough young people for their allocated slots, numbering in the thousands for some providers. Next-step planning of this sort could benefit all agencies, as

well as the young people involved. What's more, the efforts to secure program documentation for participation in MIP could carry over to SYEP, as much of the same documentation is required for participation and can serve as a barrier to young people's participation. While individual foster care agencies and workforce providers can and have coordinated on this front, ACS and the Department of Youth and Community Development should leverage this opportunity to build stronger formal and informal connections between MIP and SYEP programs and providers.

MIP expansion: MIP's program design addresses some of the real barriers to entering the world of work on the part of young adults in foster care, and outcomes to date demonstrate the promise of the model, at least in the short term. While more robust data collection and analysis are recommended (see next recommendation) as one way to further analyze program outcomes and ideally build a case for the continuation of MIP, early evidence points to the potential for expanding the program model in at least three ways:

- expansion to New York City's other foster care agencies, either in-house or through partnership with agencies currently implementing the program;
- geographic expansion of the model to other cities or regions focused on addressing the issues accompanying youth aging out of foster care (e.g., Los Angeles, Chicago, etc.); and
- application of the model to other high-need populations, including individuals with developmental disabilities or justice-involved young adults.

Expansion to other populations was a recommendation or question posed by multiple MIP stakeholders, in response to reflection on the potential of the model, as well as in reaction to their experience working with the populations referenced. In fact, the Pinkerton Foundation has recently allowed agencies to enroll young adults engaged in preventative care in MIP to expand the recruitment pool and reach other young adults likely to benefit from the program. MIP's role as a safety net for young people during the pandemic, in addition to the program's intended functions of providing career development and exploration, provides further fodder for considering how the model might be beneficial to other in-need populations.

A focus on model expansion also necessitates careful reflection on what has worked well and not so well in implementing MIP, and what agency characteristics and capacities strongly correlate with successful implementation. This report, while not a formal evaluation, sets out to identify best and promising practices, laying the groundwork for a more rigorous examination of program implementation, processes, outcomes, and impact on participating young adults, their foster families, and the foster care agencies.

Data collection capacity: Foster care agencies vary in their existing infrastructure and capacity to collect and report data related to career and workforce development. MIP requires participating agencies to report certain data on an annual basis, providing an on-ramp for integrating relevant metrics into organizational practice. However, continuation of the program—and potential expansion to additional agencies and populations—will necessitate more robust data collection practices. The launch of Fair Futures and its related data collection requirements provides an optimal platform for assessing how to incorporate the collection and use of data relevant to MIP—namely, skill gain, next-step planning, and related outcomes beyond MIP.

An indicator of particular interest and import to making the case for supporting and expanding programs such as MIP is the wages earned by interns. Given the structure of the internships, shaped in part by WPP, interns completing the full 240 hours earn $3,600 (at $15 per hour). An in-depth examination of how these earnings help interns and their families with immediate needs or contribute to longer-term savings could yield valuable insights into the broader impact of programs such as MIP.

Capacity building and initiative support: A distinguishing feature of MIP is the ongoing capacity building and Learning Community scaffolding erected to support program implementation, share strategies and challenges, and build connections for participating interns and their agencies to the broader workforce and educational ecosystem in New York City. Staff from JCCA, for example, attribute relationships with staff from other MIP agencies and the sharing of strategies to participation in the Learning Community. Robust and ongoing capacity building supports—often an overlooked component of many programs—have been critical to MIP's operations, especially during the pandemic. Absent the existing and ongoing Learning Community forum, agencies would likely have been on their own to experiment with the shift to remote internships, getting interns vaccinated, and dealing with other effects of the pandemic. Efforts to expand or replicate MIP should not move forward without careful consideration of how critical the capacity building infrastructure has been to program success.

CONCLUSION

THIS REPORT HAS EXPLORED PROMISING AND BEST PRACTICES IN PLACE AT agencies implementing the Mentored Internship Program, a program entering its fifth year and focused on equipping youth aging out of foster care with meaningful and supportive work experience. While programmatic data point to positive outcomes for the young adults involved, the testimonies of interns, mentors, program staff, and leaders powerfully capture the potential of the model and point the way toward more rigorous lines of inquiry on MIP and its ability to position young people and the agencies that work with them for success. The following statements provide insights into the personal, programmatic, and systemic promise of the MIP model:

INTERN

Through MIP, I learned a lot about my capabilities. I have low self-esteem but people were complimenting me, acknowledging my good work … I wanted to become a nurse, but the internship made me explore other things. I realized how many options I have.

TATIANA RAMOS,
intern at the New York Foundling

MENTOR

The main thing for me is to make them feel important, that they're worth something, that this is a real job. And it works. I'm hard on the ones I need to be hard on. It's challenging with some and easy with others, but at the end of the day they're all good kids. These are the kids who are going to rule the world, so we need to set them up for success.

ANNETTE TORRES,
mentor and office manager at Catholic Guardian Services

PROGRAM STAFF

MIP has really changed the association that the youth has in interacting with the agency. Before MIP, it was, "I come to the agency to see my case planner, etc. We focus on what I need to do." MIP has changed that; it gives them a sense of purpose and intent, to go beyond just talking about one's trauma and history. Now it's going to Rising Ground outside of case management.

ERIKA DOOMES,
MIP coordinator at Rising Ground

PROGRAM LEADER

An unintended benefit of MIP is the whole scaffold of support that now exists to make sure interns have a good experience. [A partner organization] reached out to me about taking on an intern. In my not wanting young people to be denied an internship, I had this infrastructure to plug into for them to be successful in their internships … If it weren't for the MIP infrastructure, mentors, and supports, I don't think I would have been able to do that little bit to have the same outcome. It probably would have been more of an "oh no, what do I do with them today" situation.

MICHELLE YANCHE,
chief executive officer of Good Shepherd Services

APPENDIX A: STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

CONDUCTED NOVEMBER 2021 THROUGH FEBRUARY 2022

MIP AGENCIES

Catholic Guardian Services: Caryn Ashare, Cashay Haffoney, Carla Small-Covington, Annette Torres
Children's Aid Society: Georgia Boothe, Phoebe Boyer, Brandon Henry
Children's Village: Atiya Gordon, Vincent Price
Forestdale: Danielle Fuller, William Weisberg
Good Shepherd Services: LuAnne Blaauboer, Ti-Me Gadsden, Michelle Yanche
Graham Windham: Bonnie Kornberg, Pilar Larancuent, Julia Lindsey, Kristen Ragusa, Gwendolyn Vargas
HeartShare St. Vincent Services: Debbie Pierre, Jermaine Smith
JCCA: Kinia Gonzalez, Kyana Hicks
New York Foundling: Carly Johnson, Denise Mauro, Christina McDonald, Tatiana Ramos, LaToya Samuel, Charizma Simpkins
Rising Ground: Erica Doomes
SCO Family of Services: Shamise Harvin, Mark McCaskill, Jennifer Outlaw, Kimberly Thomas
Sheltering Arms Children and Family Services: Makeda Cummings-Forbes, Elizabeth McCarthy, Sidney West

INITIATIVE FUNDERS, CAPACITY BUILDING PARTNERS, AND RELATED INITIATIVES

Change Machine: Tamika Johnson
Fair Futures: Katie Napolitano, Emil Ramnarine
MIP University: Wendell Moore
New York City Administration for Children's Services: Ray Singleton
The Pinkerton Foundation: Laurie Dien
Workplace Center, Columbia School of Social Work: Lauren Gates
Youth Communication: Janelle Greco
Youth Development Institute: Theodore Phillips

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ENDNOTES

[1] Total enrollment numbers are current through early 2022.
[2] High School Graduation Rates of Youth in Foster Care Annual Report 2021. New York City Administration for Children's Services. 2021.
[3] Hilliard, Tom. *Fostering Careers*. Center for an Urban Future. September 2011.
[4] *Youth Experience Survey 2021*. New York City Administration for Children's Services. 2021.
[5] MIP initially included eight foster care agencies; four additional agencies joined the initiative in 2019.
[6] *Foster Care Strategic Blueprint Progress Report: FY2020*. New York City Administration for Children's Services. January 2021.
[7] *Foster Care Strategic Blueprint: FY 2019–FY2023*. New York City Administration for Children's Services. March 2018.
[8] Other priority areas include improvements in permanency outcomes; foster care placements; health, mental health, and educational services; and building systemic capacity.
[9] The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood allows states to extend foster care until the age of 21 and then use Chafee funds to support the transition out of foster care until the age of 23.
[10] Hilliard, Tom. *Fostering Careers*. Center for an Urban Future. September 2011.
[11] *NYC ACS Report on Youth in Foster Care, 2020*. New York City Administration for Children's Services. 2020. In calendar year 2020, 549 youth aged out of foster care (p. 6).
[12] Hilliard, Tom. *Fostering Careers*. Center for an Urban Future. September 2011.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Courtney, Mark, et al. *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Ages 23 and 24*. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. 2010.
[15] *High School Graduation Rates of Youth in Foster Care Annual Report 2021*. New York City Administration for Children's Services. 2021.
[16] *Why Go to School?* New York State Department of Labor. Accessed April 14, 2022.
[17] Youth in care at the Children's Village Dobbs Ferry location live on site at a residential treatment campus rather than in a home with kin or a foster family.
[18] The duration of an internship varies widely across organizations. Factors impacting internship length include an intern's overall availability—as many are concurrently enrolled in school—the mentor's or supervisor's schedule, and time of year.
[19] Interns earn the minimum wage of $15 per hour. Working the full 240 hours allowed at $15 per hour results in maximum earnings of $3,600. With an average of 166 hours completed per internship, the average earnings equal $2,490.
[20] A group of anonymous donors has invested in MIP by awarding grants of $10,000 annually to each agency to cover the wages of interns who either do not qualify for WPP (e.g., enrolled in college, undocumented, etc.) or are in the process of compiling required paperwork to receive wages through WPP when the internship begins.
[21] *Youth Experience Survey 2021*. New York City Administration for Children's Services. 2021.
[22] In 2021, agencies participating in MIP had access, through Learning Community meetings and customized technical assistance, to financial security and capability training and resources offered by Change Machine.
[23] See New Ways to Work's "All Youth-One System" framework for more information.
[24] See http://wbltoolkit.cte.nyc/ for more information on the Work-Based Learning Toolkit.
[25] Funding from ACS cannot be allocated toward internship wages.
[26] WPP, according to David Berman, director of programs and evaluation at the NYC Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity, is designed as an add-on to existing programs rather than a standalone program. As such, the funding source applies only to internship wages. Were WPP altered to function more like a stand-alone program—complete with allowances for administrative costs—applicants would be required to partake in a more extensive request for proposals process.