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Keys to Success Impact Evaluation Report



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Keys to Success Impact Evaluation

Introduction

According to data from the Department of Child Safety (DCS), there were nearly 11,000 youth ages 0-20 in out-of-home-care through the Arizona foster care system as of June 2023, with 881 of these youth being at least 18 years old. DCS data trends over the last five years indicate that over 800 youths annually turn 18 while in out-of-home care with DCS.¹ A report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that, in 2021, nearly half (47%) of youth who exited foster care in Arizona “aged out” of the system versus being adopted, reunited with their biological family, going to live with a relative, or establishing a permanent guardianship.² For a multitude of reasons, former foster youth often lack important supports and resources, such as help with housing or transportation, or a reliable and trusted adult who can provide career guidance and teach them about important life skills.³ Notably, studies have shown that providing foster youth with additional supportive services during their transition to self-sufficiency can improve outcomes related to health and wellness, housing stability, education, and more.⁴

The Keys to Success program, administered by the Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation (AFFCF), addresses the critical needs of foster youth who are transitioning out of the foster care system by providing them with specialized career, education, and life skills support, education, and training. The program is specifically tailored to each client based on their individual goals and needs. Youth are empowered to utilize the services they deem most important for their personal and professional growth. In 2022 alone, Keys to Success enrolled 169 new youth.⁵ Since its inception, the KTS program has served over 1,500 of Arizona’s youth.

In 2023, AFFCF contracted Morrison Institute for Public Policy to conduct an impact evaluation of the Keys to Success program. This report illuminates findings from various data sources that provide valuable insights into the impact of the program on participants since 2017.

¹ Department of Child Safety (DCS), “FY23 Monthly Operational Outcomes Report November 2023,” accessed December 20, 2023, <https://dcs.az.gov/news-reports/performance-measures>.

² The Annie E. Casey Foundation, “2023 Arizona Profile: Transition-Age Youth in Foster Care,” accessed December 20, 2023, <https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-fosteringyouth-stateprofile-AZ.pdf>.

³ Youth.gov, “Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care: Challenges and Solutions,” accessed August 15, 2023, <https://youth.gov/youth-briefs/foster-care-youth-brief/challenges>.

⁴ Thom Reilly and David Schlinkert. “Comparing Outcomes 20 Years Apart: Transitioning Out of Foster Care for Emerging Adults.” *Focus on Poverty* 39, no. 1 (2023): 14-17. <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.irp.wisc.edu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Focus-on-Poverty-39-1d.pdf>.

California Evidence Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, “Topic: Youth Transitioning into Adulthood Programs,” accessed December 20, 2023, <https://www.cebc4cw.org/topic/youth-transitioning-into-adulthood/>

⁵ Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation, “2022 Program Outcomes,” accessed August 15, 2023, <https://www.affcf.org/keys/>

Methods

Morrison Institute conducted a virtual focus group and a survey with Keys to Success program participants. The focus group was conducted first so that the participants' feedback could be used to inform survey iteration prior to distribution. Evaluators were also provided with key outcomes data collected by the Keys to Success team.

Focus group

The lead evaluator from Morrison Institute for Public Policy conducted the focus group via Zoom on July 25, 2023. Sixteen (16) Keys to Success participants registered for the focus group and four (4) attended and provided their perspectives, experiences, and feedback. Audio from the focus group was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by another research analyst using thematic analysis. All participants were given a \$25 Amazon gift card. The findings below are presented by focus group question. Findings are not representative of the larger KTS participant population; however, responses did indicate some common experiences among the four participants.

Survey

Evaluators worked with KTS program leadership to update a client survey that was used in previous years. Most survey questions asked participants to respond on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The survey also included three open-ended questions about the program's contribution toward goal achievement, the most helpful program components of the program, and opportunities for improvement. The survey was programmed in Qualtrics and participants were invited by AFFCF via Constant Contact to complete the survey in September 2023. The first 10 participants received a \$25 gift card.

Keys to Success program data

AFFCF leadership provided Morrison Institute with administrative data collected since the program's inception to track and monitor participant outcomes. Morrison Institute reviewed this data and included graduation rates and other key outcomes.

Results

Since 2017, Keys to Success has **graduated over 850 youth** transitioning out of foster care. **Figure 1** includes administrative data that show the success rates for youth completing (or 'graduating') from the program each year. The figure also highlights how many 'graduated' participants chose to re-engage with KTS after their program completion to continue to access the resources and support they need (i.e., Re-engaged-Graduated). Notably, the numbers for those 'participating' are constantly in flux as participants enter and exit the program each year. The metrics in Figure 1 include administrative data from Keys to Success as of June 21, 2023.

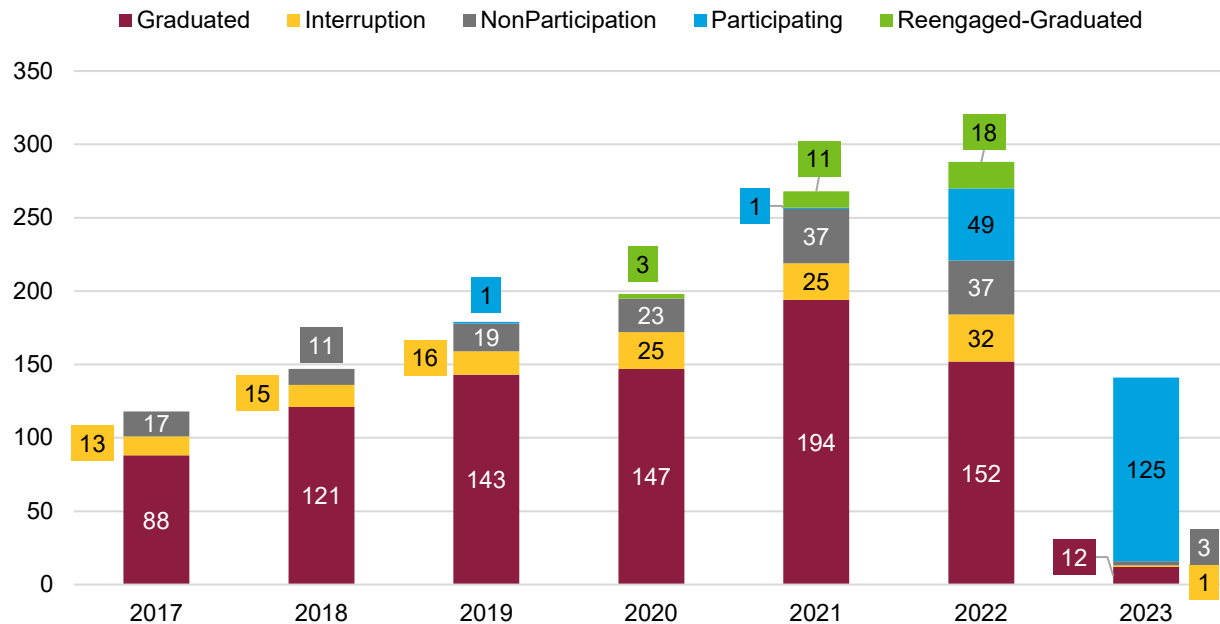


Figure 1. Status of KTS participants over time as of June 21, 2023

Notably, **since its inception in 2014** as a pilot program, Keys to Success has **graduated 1,169 youth** transitioning out of foster care. Administrative data from 2014-2016 were not available and are not included in this report, therefore, results may be conservative estimates of impact.

Also tracked via administrative program data are key outcomes for success as identified by the Keys to Success program.

Keys to Success Target Outcomes

- **80%** secure employment within 1 year of program enrollment
- **75%** retain employment for 30 or more days
- **70%** enrolled for 6+ months report gains in skill or aptitude
- **65%** increase their total self-sufficiency score by 3+ points within 1 year
- **65%** enroll in postsecondary education or vocational training OR develop an industry-specific career pathway within 6 months of program enrollment

A participant's total self-sufficiency score is determined using the Self-Sufficiency matrix. The matrix allows Keys to Success to measure impacts across five priority life domains including, *income, employment, adult education, social support, and mobility*. The matrix uses a 5-point scale with descriptive indicators of success. For example, response options for *income* range from 1: "No income" to 5: "Income is sufficient, well managed; [participant] has discretionary income and is able to save." Please see **Appendix I: Self-Sufficiency Matrix** for review of the full Self-Sufficiency matrix. Participants complete the measure prior to receiving services and then again after they graduate from the program.

As seen in **Figure 2**, all target performance outcomes were exceeded when analyzed across program participation from 2017-2023. Notably, 88% of youth secured employment within 1 year, and 86% retained employment for 30 or more days. In addition, 86% of youth who were enrolled for 6+ months reported gains in skill or aptitude, and 80% were enrolled in postsecondary education or vocational training or developed an industry-specific career pathway within 6 months of program enrollment. Finally, 76% of KTS participants saw a 3-point increase in their total Self Sufficiency Matrix score within 1 year.

All KTS program target metrics were exceeded.

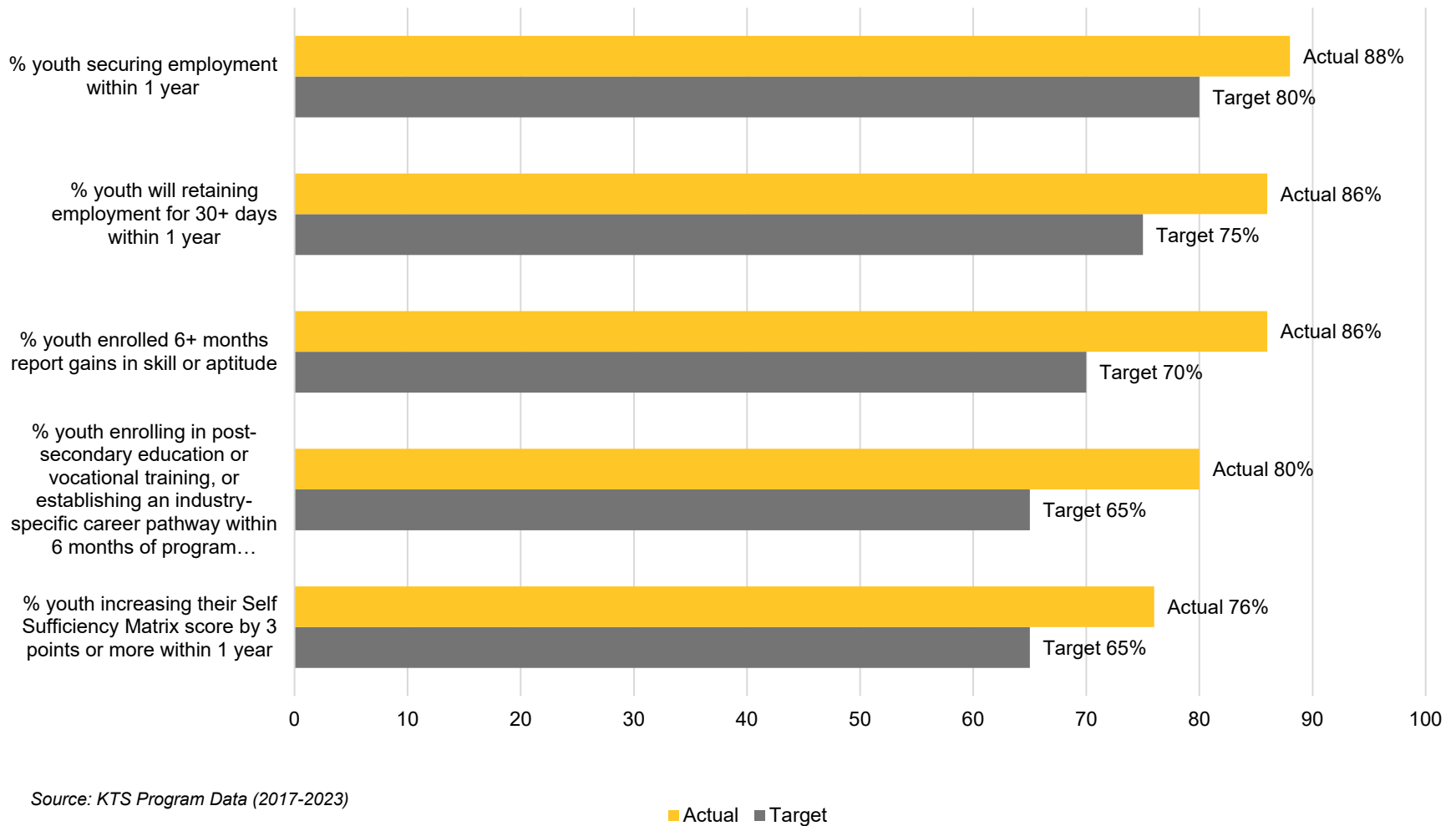


Figure 2. Percent of participants meeting Keys to Success outcomes

Results from the program data above complement the impacts heard in the focus group and survey. In addition, focus group and survey findings were largely complimentary and thus are presented in concert by content area in the sections that follow: Gains in knowledge and skills, Contributions toward goals, Program quality, Helpful program components, and Opportunities for improvement.

Gains in knowledge and skills

One hundred eight (108) survey responses were received across the 3-week distribution period. Most (75%) participants had received services from Keys to Success within the past year, indicating that responses are inclusive of recent experiences and perspectives.

Most survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that the program prepared them to use their support network to reach their career goals, identify education and training programs to meet needs, and identify a career that matches their interests and skills. Overall, participants reported high levels of preparedness as a result of the Keys to Success program.

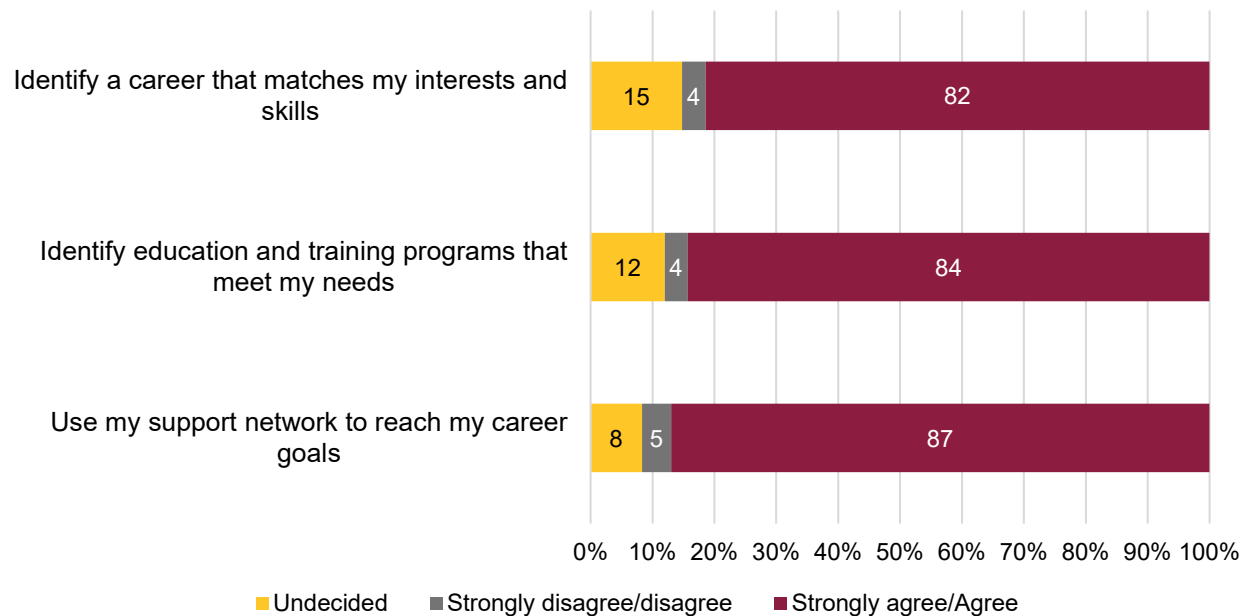
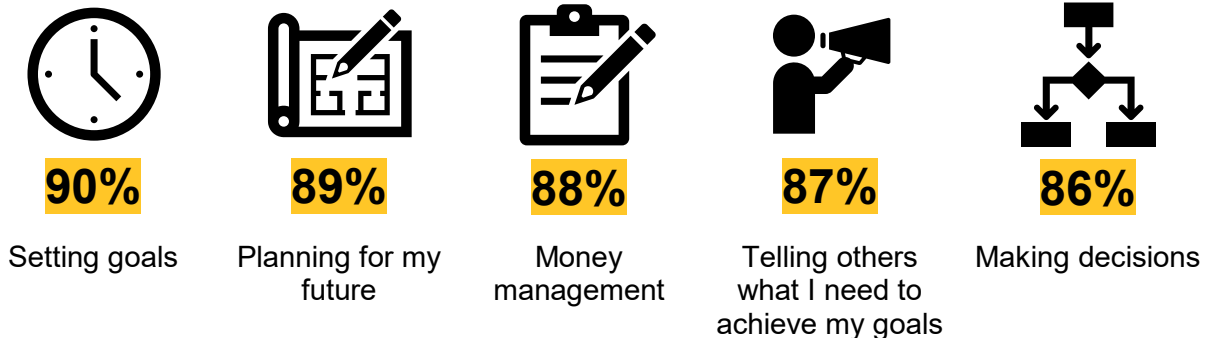


Figure 3. Program participants rated their preparedness in meeting career goals (n = 108)

Additionally, the majority of respondents felt that the Keys to Success program made them better at utilizing skills that promote self-sufficiency and healthy life habits. For example, 90% of participants agreed that because of the KTS program, they are better able to set goals for themselves; 89% agreed that the program has enabled them to plan for their future; and 87% of respondents agreed that they are now able to tell others what they need to achieve their goals.

Keys to Success has made me better at...



Participants in the focus group and survey reported learning useful skills during their time participating in Keys to Success, such as budgeting and money management, how to navigate medical and car insurance, and what some participants described as “how to be an adult.”

“So I can say they’ve taught me about life in a way, like when it comes down to budgeting, credit, anything that has to do [with] get[ting] into a place...stuff like that.” – Focus group participant

“I enjoyed having a worker who came in and helped walk me through adulting things like college applications, job searching and just general small things.”
– Survey participant

Contributions toward goals

Survey participants felt that several aspects of Keys to Success contributed to progress toward their life goals. The top aspects participants mentioned in open-ended responses were **education support**, **goal setting**, **job support**, and **general help and support**.

“They’ve just supported me through a lot and help[ed] me when I needed them most” – Survey participant

Assistance with achieving education goals, such as graduating or getting into school, was also noted. Similarly, help finding and securing employment, as well as interview and resume preparation, were frequently mentioned. Participants also felt that defining, setting, and achieving goals was an instrumental outcome of their participation.

"[KTS] has helped me identify and prioritize my goals as well as helping me find the resources to complete my goals." – Survey participant

Other aspects of Keys to Success that participants felt contributed to their progress were financial education, housing support, and access to transportation. Several participants described the program as helpful and playing a role in growing as people.

Quality of the program

The survey asked several questions about the program quality and its ability to provide the needed support and resources. Findings show that over 90% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the **overall program quality was good** and that the program **provided them with a trusted mentor** they could rely on. Similarly, 90% of participants agreed that they felt valued and supported by the KTS team and 89% agreed that the KTS team provided helpful resources.



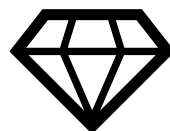
92%

The overall quality of the KTS program is good.



91%

The program provided me with a trusted mentor whom I could rely on.



90%

I felt valued and supported by my KTS team.



89%

My KTS team provided helpful resources.

Most survey participants also indicated that Keys to Success met their needs and that they would recommend the program to others.

91%

of survey participants would **recommend Keys to Success** to others.

89%

of survey participants felt their **needs were met by Keys to Success**.

Helpful program components

There were many aspects of the program that participants felt were the most helpful, however, the **supportive staff**, **job support**, and **financial education** provided were the top supports mentioned in the open-ended survey responses. Participants felt that the staff was helpful, supportive, and encouraging. They also expressed appreciation for help finding and securing employment, as well as the financial education they received where they could learn about money management. Education support for school, as well as financial assistance with things like rent or purchasing items was also frequently mentioned.

Focus group participants also spoke favorably of the program, saying they received various resources and support. Participants most commonly noted receiving **assistance with education**, which included help with enrollment, obtaining school laptops, and finding schools

that were a good fit for participants. Other forms of support used included access to household items, childcare products for those with children, and obtaining housing. Several participants also mentioned how helpful the program was in obtaining transportation, such as purchasing vehicles, bicycles, or receiving rides. Finally, participants noted how helpful it was to be connected with other supportive programs and how the program helped them find employment.

Similarly, focus group participants most commonly cited staff – whom they described as knowledgeable, helpful, and supportive – when asked about why they continued to engage in the Keys to Success program. Some participants described having an emotional bond with their case workers and expressed that they felt they had someone who believed in them and who they could always talk to. More generally, participants described the program as a sort of support system that they could rely on to be there for them and follow through with their needs.

“...the person I have right now, she's very helpful...let's say I need something, like, she'll be like right there and say, 'Alright we got it.' And then I'll have it within a couple weeks of that. They're always helpful, even if I need to talk to somebody. They're still there to talk to.” – Focus group participant

Opportunities to improve the program

A majority of survey participants did not feel any changes were needed to the program. However, several participants noted that staff engagement with participants could be improved. Specifically, **more frequent communication and check-ins** with participants, **increasing the number of program staff** to provide more support, and **more time with mentors** were all mentioned. Notably, increasing KTS staff to allow more time with caseworkers/specialist was also mentioned by focus group participants. Focus group participants also mentioned that they would like to be informed when their specialist leaves their position. These participants noted that they were not informed that their specialists were leaving and that the abrupt change was hard when they formed a close relationship with them.

Additional recommendations for program improvement from the survey include expanding education offerings and making them more hands-on. Some participants expressed a desire for more opportunities to socialize with other participants. Finally, some participants mentioned ways to improve resources, such as more funding for participants, being clear about what support is available, and ensuring that partner organizations are being helpful to participants.

“So I've had those three [specialists] and I've grown like a really close relationship with them. And then they just, like, moved and left. And then I...never heard from them again.” – Focus group participant

“So once [specialists] leave the job, I do feel like maybe checking in back with like the students or the people that [they] have helped. Because the part, the roles that they've played in my life have been important for me, and it's just...being in the foster care, you do deal with a lot of people who come around and leave and come around and leave.” – Focus group participant

Finally, focus group participants also talked about having more physical locations, receiving formal recognition of participant achievements, and offering the program at even younger ages.

“I wished that I had somebody in Keys to Success when I was a little bit younger because I was in the system for most of my life...it would’ve helped a lot.”

– Focus group participant

Summary

The findings above provide evidence across numerous data sources of the meaningful impacts of the Keys to Success program on youth transitioning out of the foster care system. KTS was successful in not only meeting, but exceeding, all target outcomes across program participant from the start of the program in 2017. Survey and focus group data continued to highlight the utility and effectiveness of the program in helping youth acquire important knowledge, skills, and resources to be self-sufficient and successful in their career and educational aspirations. For example, participants discussed gaining assistance with employment, transportation, and schooling, as well as gaining life skills such as acquiring insurance and money management.

Results also highlight the unique and supportive role that the KTS specialist/caseworker plays in the life of KTS youth. Participants mentioned forming close relationships with their specialists who they felt helped them make progress toward their education and career goals while also serving as a trusted support and mentor they could rely on.

A vast majority of participants indicated that the program met their needs and that they would recommend Keys to Success to others. Participants consistently highlighted the benefits of participating in the program and how the program has helped them achieve their life goals. Overall, the findings show that participants found great value in the program – they appreciated the financial, logistical, and practical support and guidance as well as the unique relationship with their specialist who played a key role in empowering them toward a successful future.

“[Keys to Success] helped me with school and getting a job. [They] helped me get my driver's license and more. **They changed my mind on how the world should look.**” – Survey participant

Appendix I: Self-Sufficiency Matrix

KTS Self-Sufficiency Matrix: Pre-Measure

Youth ID# _____ Date _____ CDS Name _____

Directions: At the initial intake session – using a 1 to 5 scale -- please rate your youth on the following domains. This same tool will be re-administered in 6 months so your initial rating should reflect as accurately as possible your perception of the youth's current situation.

DOMAIN	1	2	3	4	5
Income	No income.	Inadequate income and/or spontaneous or inappropriate spending.	Can meet basic needs with subsidy; appropriate spending.	Can meet basic needs and manage debt without assistance.	Income is sufficient, well managed; has discretionary income and is able to save.
Employment	No job.	Temporary, part-time or seasonal; inadequate pay, no benefits.	Employed full time; inadequate pay; few or no benefits.	Employed full time with adequate pay and benefits.	Maintains permanent employment with adequate income and benefits.
Adult Education	Literacy problems and/or no high school diploma/GED are serious barriers to employment.	Enrolled in literacy and/or GED program and/or has sufficient command of English to where language is not a barrier to employment.	Has high school diploma/GED.	Needs additional education/training to improve employment situation and/or to resolve literacy problems to where they are able to function effectively in society.	Has completed education/training needed to become employable. No literacy problems.
Social Support Network	Lack of necessary support network (family/friends) to set and achieve life goals.	Support network available but lack ability or resources to help with goal achievement.	Support network <u>somewhat engaged</u> and assisting with development of skills related to program goals.	Support network <u>very engaged</u> and assisting with development of skills related to program goals.	Support network <u>strongly engaged</u> , healthy and expanding. Communication is consistently open.
Mobility	No access to transportation, public or private; may have car that is inoperable.	Transportation is available, but unreliable, unpredictable, unaffordable; may have car but no insurance, license, etc.	Transportation is available and reliable, but limited and/or inconvenient; drivers are licensed and minimally insured.	Transportation is generally accessible to meet basic travel needs.	Transportation is readily available and affordable; car is adequately insured.

KTS Self-Sufficiency Matrix: Post-Measure

Youth ID# _____ Date _____ CDS Name _____

Directions: After 6 months of active participation in the KTS program – using a 1 to 5 scale – please again rate your youth on the following domains.

DOMAIN	1	2	3	4	5
Income	No income.	Inadequate income and/or spontaneous or inappropriate spending.	Can meet basic needs with subsidy; appropriate spending.	Can meet basic needs and manage debt without assistance.	Income is sufficient, well managed; has discretionary income and is able to save.
Employment	No job.	Temporary, part-time or seasonal; inadequate pay, no benefits.	Employed full time; inadequate pay; few or no benefits.	Employed full time with adequate pay and benefits.	Maintains permanent employment with adequate income and benefits.
Adult Education	Literacy problems and/or no high school diploma/GED are serious barriers to employment.	Enrolled in literacy and/or GED program and/or has sufficient command of English to where language is not a barrier to employment.	Has high school diploma/GED.	Needs additional education/training to improve employment situation and/or to resolve literacy problems to where they are able to function effectively in society.	Has completed education/training needed to become employable. No literacy problems.
Social Support Network	Lack of necessary support network (family/friends) to set and achieve life goals.	Support network available but lack ability or resources to help with goal achievement.	Support network somewhat engaged and assisting with development of skills related to program goals.	Support network very engaged and assisting with development of skills related to program goals.	Support network strongly engaged, healthy and expanding. Communication is consistently open.
Mobility	No access to transportation, public or private; may have car that is inoperable.	Transportation is available, but unreliable, unpredictable, unaffordable; may have care but no insurance, license, etc.	Transportation is available and reliable, but limited and/or inconvenient; drivers are licensed and minimally insured.	Transportation is generally accessible to meet basic travel needs.	Transportation is readily available and affordable; car is adequately insured.