

# Westchester Building Futures



## BraveLife (BLI) Intervention Manual

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George Latimer  
Westchester County Executive



*Giving Kids the Chance of a Lifetime*

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- ❖ The team at The Children’s Village that works to implement the BLI, led by Vice President Warren Kent and his staff of Alexis Santiago-Autar, Kaylene Quinones, Paulette Young, Natasha Bazile, Tawan Wade, and Sidney Karr.
- ❖ The Bravehearts Inc., who helped make Westchester Building Futures possible, and the 25 plus agencies and organizations who invested authentically and concretely to the development of the BLI.
- ❖ The experienced child/youth welfare professionals, community-based providers, and legal eagles who helped plan, coordinate and implement the BLI, working closely with youth advocates and young people in care/alumni of care.
- ❖ And a special thank you to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families-Children’s Bureau. Catherine Heath provided outstanding leadership and guidance to the BLI. In addition, the BLI project was fortunate to have the steadfast support of Cay Bradley and Andy Gothro from Mathematica.

L.A. (BraveLife young adult):

“Having a peer to peer navigator makes me feel really supported. I have achieved so many things that I never thought I could. BraveLife has given me the tools to live a better life for myself and my daughter.”



From the beginning of Westchester Building Futures (WBF), young adults with lived experience have played a crucial role in shaping the development of the BraveLife Intervention (BLI). A group of young adults joined professionals at the first planning committee to discuss systemic issues they faced while involved with the child welfare system. The leadership within WCDSS allowed for a space for these young adults to express their truth and be seated at the table with leaders within the many child welfare organizations within Westchester County. This enabled youth voice to be heard and their stories to be used to glean insight on what worked and what did not work in the child welfare system for youth. A paradigm shift started to happen as seasoned professionals realized that, to create a better system for youth and families, the system had to listen to those with lived experience and implement changes, bearing in mind the perspective of those who had encountered that same system. These changes included the role of peer navigators working in conjunction with seasoned professionals to help youth navigate the often complex and confusing child welfare system. Over several years, this group of young adults evolved into a youth movement with more than 200 members called Bravehearts.

This partnership between young adults with lived experience and child welfare professionals created the BLI, a model using peer navigators. These professionals and young adults have continued to work together to shape the BLI into what it is today: a comprehensive service model that engages and empowers youth and connects them to concrete resources.

As WBF developed and moved into the Phase 2 of the Youth At-Risk of Homelessness (YARH) grant, implementation of BLI started. BLI was created as a model to test whether this intervention would increase positive outcomes for youth and prevent homelessness of youth aging out of foster care. Some of the ideas implemented with the voices of these experienced young people included developing peer navigators to use their personal expertise in assisting other youth on their child welfare journey. WBF also defined the stages of the BLI: engagement, empowerment, and connections. This idea generated from young people expressing that they would like a system that engaged them, empowered them, and connected them to get their needs met. Young adults with lived experience also expressed the need for levels of support to assist a team of peer navigators to do the work effectively in recognition of the trauma and triggers they encountered within this work; learning strategic sharing; learning about ethical dilemmas; and learning how to effectively navigate the peer navigator role within the child welfare system. This process has not been easy. It has included numerous moments of self-reflection among both seasoned professionals and young adults with lived experience, strong and relentless advocacy in the face of the status quo, opportunities to learn and grow on the part of both professionals and the P2P Navigators, and a willingness to make this project the best it can be for youth involved with child welfare, for today and for the future.

## **I. Purpose of the Manual.**

The Children's Bureau, within the Administration for Children and Families (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services), is funding a multi-phase grant program to build the evidence base on what works to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults who have been involved in the child welfare system. Currently, there is very little evidence on how to meet the needs of this population. This program is referred to as Youth At-Risk of Homelessness (YARH). Eighteen organizations received funding for the first phase, a two-year planning grant (2013 – 2015). Six of those organizations received funding for the second phase, a three-year initial implementation grant (2015 – 2018).

YARH focuses on three populations: (1) adolescents who enter foster care between ages 14 and 17, (2) young adults aging out of foster care, and (3) homeless youth/young adults with foster care histories up to age 21.

During the planning phase, grantees conducted data analyses to help them understand their local population and develop a comprehensive service model to improve outcomes in housing, education and training, social well-being, and permanent connections. During the implementation phase, grantees are refining and testing their comprehensive service model. They conducted usability testing to determine the feasibility of specific elements of the model and conducted a formative evaluation to understand what supports and structures were needed to implement the model with fidelity. Finally, each grantee developed this manual in preparation for future work supporting the implementation of the comprehensive service model as part of YARH-3 or other replications or expansions without federal support. Mathematica assisted the grantees under a federal contract to provide evaluation technical assistance. Mathematica also documented grantees' efforts through process studies of each grant phase.

This manual serves two distinct purposes. First, in Section II, Westchester, the grantee documents their work and lessons learned in the planning and initial implementation phases. Second, Westchester, the grantee describes the comprehensive service model in full detail to support future implementation.



## II. History of Development of Intervention

### A. General Description of YARH Grant Program

In September 2013, the Children’s Bureau (CB), within the Administration for Children and Families (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services), funded 18 grantees, for two years to develop a plan to reduce homelessness among three specific populations of older youth with child welfare involvement. Over those two years, these projects conducted a detailed data analysis to determine which youth with child welfare involvement were the most at-risk of homelessness. Based on the risk and protective factors of the populations, the grantees also reviewed the service array to identify gaps in services and supports and structured an approach to best meet the needs of each population. Grantees identified or developed comprehensive service models to address the gaps in services and supports to better meet the needs of each population. This work, known as YARH-1, served as the foundation for the next four years of work.

In September 2015, CB invited the 18 grantees to compete for a second phase of funding to refine and implement the models they developed during the planning process. CB selected six (6) grantees for the second phase, or the Youth at Risk of Homelessness Phase II grantees (or YARH2 for short). YARH-2 grantees refined their comprehensive service model and conducted usability tests and a formative evaluation to determine whether they could implement their model as intended and whether youth made changes that that will lead to the desired outcomes.

This manual is part of the work of YARH-2 to support grantees in future work implementing the comprehensive service model as part of YARH-3 or other replications or expansions without federal support.



Tara Linh Leaman, JD, Program Director,  
Westchester County Department of Social  
Services:

“The BraveLife Initiative/Intervention is a practice of learning, unlearning and relearning while fortifying authentic concrete partnerships between experienced child/youth welfare professionals, community-based implementers and youth-informed researchers. Most importantly, BraveLife is the work of healing--within, without fear and with the understanding that our emerging leaders really are our future.”

## B. Problem, Populations Identified.

The WCDSS's Westchester Building Futures (WBF) is a collaboration of community agencies, organizations, and youth with foster care experiences known as the Bravehearts.<sup>1</sup> Members of WBF are committed to reducing foster care homelessness in Westchester County. The WBF spent two years collecting and analyzing data to understand the risk of homelessness in Westchester County for youth/young adults with child welfare histories. The analyses focused on understanding risk factors associated with homelessness. The Bravehearts helped in developing the intervention.

The WBF started our work thinking of the three populations identified by the Children's Bureau: (1) youth ages 14 – 17 in care, (2) young adults ages 18 – 21 in or transitioning from care, and (3) homeless youth/young adults with foster care histories. During our work, we focused on youth/young adults who were in or transitioning from care, which we further categorized as "system-connected" and "non-system connected" youth/young adults, as described earlier. This section is based on work conducted when we were still using, and focusing on, the three populations.

Kaylene Quinones, LMSW, BraveLife Coordinator, The Children's Village:

"BraveLife to me is as much about developing a model and building evidence through data as it is about hope, healing, and a vision of a better future for our youth impacted by the child welfare system. BraveLife is unique and special to me as this was once just a thought in my head; something that others and myself wished we had growing up in the child welfare system. Now, as credible messengers, we can turn our stories into lessons learned for the healing of others including young people and the professionals that serve in this field."



We used multiple data sources to identify our target population including:

1. **Quantitative Data:** A Latent Class Analysis of youth (N=625) was completed analyzing the prevalence and pattern of protective and risk factors associated with homelessness. Data were merged using client identification numbers. Sources included: Child Care Review System, Multistate Foster Care Data Archive, Welfare Review and Tracking System; Office of Children and Family Services Data Warehouse and Homeless Management Information System.
2. **Qualitative Data:** Data collected from a series of eight focus groups offered insights about risk and protective factors from the following individuals: youth in foster care aged 14-17; youth in foster care aged 18 and over; child welfare agency representatives; and

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<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the WBF BLI initiative the Bravehearts were a small number of young adults previously in foster care. Over the years, the Bravehearts established themselves as a not-for-profit organization and have grown considerably in number.

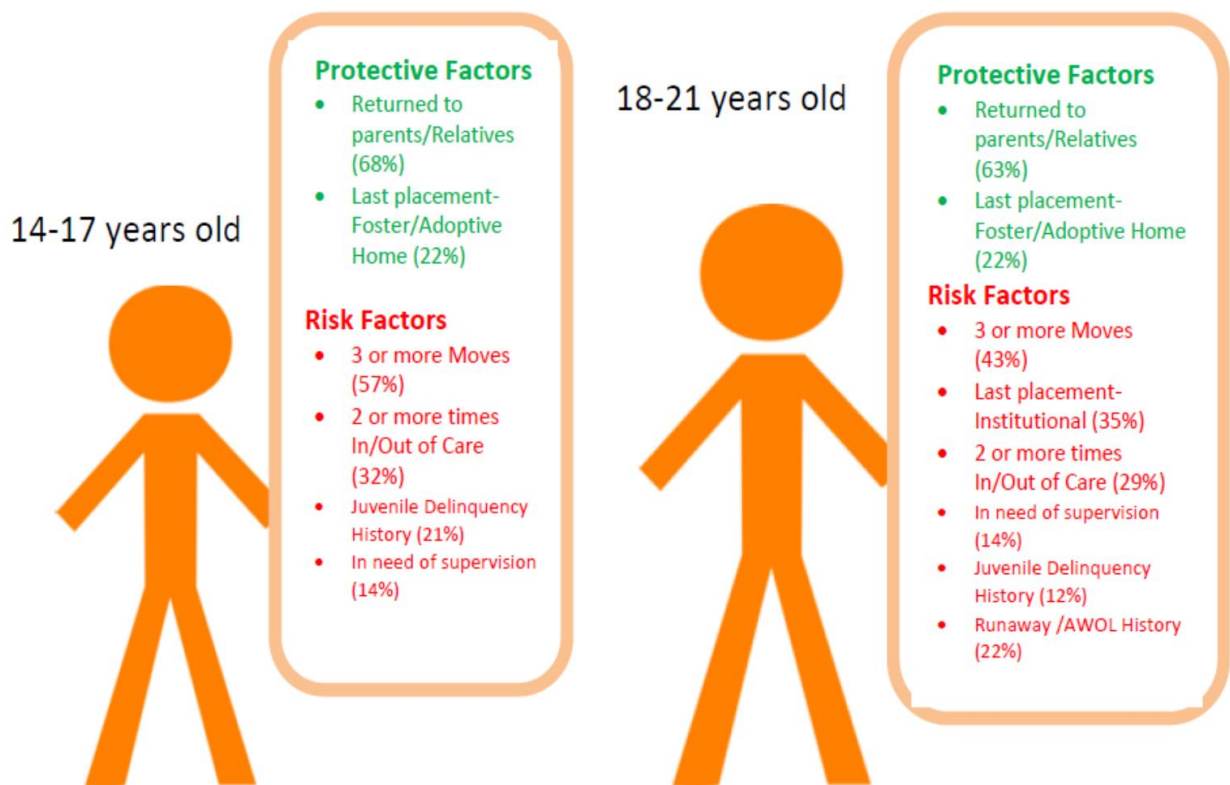


caregivers.

3. Homeless Point-in-Time Survey: Westchester’s biannual one-day countywide homeless Point-In-Time survey was modified to count the number previously in foster care.

Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT): An RCT was conducted to test whether a pilot multi-dimensional, evidence-informed intervention can facilitate goal setting and follow-up planning by current youth in foster care and young adults, primarily in the areas of housing, education, employment, and personal connections. The RCT helped to understand if the intervention was a good fit for the population.

We used a Latent Class Analysis to identify experiences that are risk factors or protective factors impacting future housing stability (see Figure 1). The Latent Class Analysis is beneficial because it “is a statistical method used to group individuals (cases, units) into classes (categories) of an unobserved (latent) variable on the basis of the responses made on a set of variable” (Porcu & Giambona, 2017, p. 129).<sup>2</sup> This analysis was based on a sample of 625 youth in foster care in Westchester County, longitudinal data were used to identify the risk and protective factors associated with homelessness. Risk factors included: (1) having three or more moves in care; (2) movement two or more times in and out of care; (3) having a juvenile delinquent history; and (4) being in need of supervision. Protective factors included being returned to parents or relatives and having a last placement in a foster or adoptive home. A qualitative study highlighted similar issues, and underscored that youth felt they needed someone with similar experiences that they could trust to help them navigate complex systems of care.



<sup>2</sup> Porcu, M., & Giambona, F. (2017). Introduction to latent class analysis with application. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 37 (1), 129-158.

*Source:* Fordham University Children and Families Latent Class Technical Report #2, April 2015

These risk and protective factors drawn from the Latent Class Analysis were used to help develop a 15-item screening instrument. For further information about the Latent Class Analysis please refer to Appendix 1-B. Other factors that were used to build the screen were based on the insights of youth, young adults, caregivers and agency representatives that participated in a series of focus groups. The focus groups provided support for several risk factors, including running away, involvement in the juvenile justice system, being in need of supervision, number of times in and out of care, and multiple foster care placements. In addition, the focus groups underscored being returned to parents, and youth having trust in professionals, family, friends and significant others as protective factors. Additional risk factors included violence in the home, conflict around culture or religion, and inadequate food, housing and shelter. The 15-item screen uses an age-sensitive calculation.

Data from a WBF pilot randomized controlled trial (RCT) were used to identify initial outcomes in the areas of housing, connections, social and emotional well-being, education/employment by the federally identified populations groups.



Janna Heyman, PhD, Professor, Fordham University:

“The BLI research can be used to inform and improve practice, policy and service delivery for youth in foster care. To date, the research underscores the value of the BLI for improved youth’s knowledge about who to turn to in the foster care system and the youths’ sense of empowerment. Overall, self-advocacy scores also improved for youth enrolled in the BLI. This grant has been extremely powerful and helped us not only to see ways that we can improve the foster care system but it has also given voice to youth, caregivers, and staff to help make a difference in the communities in which they live.”

### **C. Theory of Change.**

The theory of change for the BLI was based on information gathered from the WBF Latent Class Analysis and focus groups held with youth in foster care, caregivers and child welfare agency representatives. Information from youth raised concerns about trust and the need for engagement. The BLI focuses on having Peer-2-Peer (P2P) Navigators develop a trusting relationship with the youth. Two populations were identified: (1) system-connected youth and (2) non-system connected youth.

#### **System-connected Youth**

Youth often do not trust the child welfare system and may feel the system does not reflect their personal goals. Thus, they may not be fully engaged or feel invested in planning for their transition to adulthood. Furthermore, they may not feel empowered or prepared to navigate a complicated system or feel connected to the Westchester County Department of Social Services

(WCDSS) case managers and agency case planners, who are other service providers in the community.

We aim to change system-connected youth's engagement and investment in their future through the BraveLife Intervention (BLI), which centers on the use of Peer-2-Peer (P2P) Navigators as staff. The BLI's special component is partnering young persons in care with a comprehensively trained and supported P2P Navigator, who holds the lived and breathed experience of navigating and negotiating challenging systems of care as an alumni of care. The P2P Navigator will help serve as translator, interpreter and trusted confidant to the young person in care, to enhance linkages with the system network/staff. The BLI will prepare the youth to advocate for themselves and prepare the youth to work with the system network/staff to achieve their goals. To do this, the P2P Navigator will help the youth understand the system network and staff involved in their lives, particularly the WCDSS case managers, agency case planners<sup>3</sup> and attorneys. More importantly, this intervention focuses on strengthening the youth's relationship to the system network/staff and empowering the youth themselves. Part of this work involves having the P2P Navigator develop and model skills for the youth to navigate multifaceted systems of care. This partnership with youth, P2P Navigators and WCDSS case managers, agency case planners, and attorneys will help replenish a reservoir of trust-based relationships to achieve youth self-identified goals. See Appendix 1-C for a fuller description of the theory of change for system-connected youth, including a graphic.

### **Non-system-connected Youth**

Based on information we gleaned from initial focus groups with youth, we were concerned that youth who have previously been in the foster care system have problems with trust, in part because they were frequently moved while in care, or cycled in and out of care, making it difficult for them to engage with others and make lasting attachments. In addition, they may not feel empowered to make plans for their future and work towards these goals because they have suffered numerous disappointments in getting their needs met in the past. Furthermore, these youth may not be connected to resources in the community or know who to turn to for help when the need arises.

The overall approach, and theory of change is similar: Peer-2-Peer (P2P) Navigators who help engage, empower and connect youth. The BLI's special component is partnering youth who are disconnected from the foster care system with a comprehensively trained and supported P2P Navigator, who holds the lived and breathed experience of navigating and negotiating challenging systems of care as an alumni of care. The P2P Navigator will help serve as translator, interpreter and trusted confidant to the youth. The BLI will prepare the youth to advocate for themselves so they can achieve their goals. To do this, the P2P Navigator will forge a trusting relationship with the youth and encourage the youth to identify goals for themselves in their lives outside the child welfare system. The P2P Navigators will support the youth in connecting independently with organizations providing core needed services, such as youth shelters, and which can provide case management services that can help the youth access

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<sup>33</sup> In Westchester County, DSS contracts out much of the day-to-day case management responsibilities to community organizations that WCDSS refer to as child welfare agencies. Agency case planners are specific to each child welfare agency and they work with youth to provide and coordinate the services a youth may need. The areas of service coordination include but are not limited to permanency, education, employment, and the overall physical and mental well-being of the youth.

additional services needed to reach the goals they set for themselves. For all non-system connected youth, part of this work involves having the P2P Navigator develop and model skills for the youth to navigate multifaceted community resources. This partnership with youth, P2P Navigators and community professionals will help replenish a reservoir of trust-based relationships to achieve youth self-identified goals. Connections to community resources may differ by youths' particular needs. For example, a homeless non-system connected youth needs to be offered housing options as a matter of urgency. P2P Navigators will play a central role in making sure non-system connected youth work with professionals to foster connections on their own. See Appendix 1-C for a fuller description of the theory of change for system-connected youth, including a graphic.

Over the course of our work, we did not make substantial changes to the overall theory of change. It was refined as we conducted the initial implementation and developed a deeper understanding of what P2P Navigators did with youth/young adults. For example, more in-depth material was added to the theory of change regarding P2P Navigators working in collaboration with the youth during Empowerment and Connections. Initially, the theory of change was developed for the Children's Bureau identified three population groups. The WBF team revised the focus of its work for two population and developed two separate theories of change – one for system-connected youth and one for non-system connected youth. There are more similarities than differences in the theories of change as the core intervention is similar, while recognizing the different contexts in which the youth/young adult lives and their age-appropriate developmental differences.

#### **D. Logic Model.**

We used each theory of change to develop a logic model, which provides more details on the program components. The logic models articulate the inputs, activities, and outcomes of the BLI. Similar to the theory of change work, the logic model has been refined during our initial implementation, but the main ideas have remained constant. The colors indicate the phases of BLI in the logic model.

The logic model captures the three phases: EngageMENT; EmpowerMENT and Connections. The EngageMENT phase (shown in Yellow), focuses on the outcomes relevant to formulating a trusting and supportive network. The EmpowerMENT phase (shown in Pink) underscores the importance of outcomes relevant to goals, advocacy, empowerment, self-efficacy and self-esteem in a youths' life. The Connection phase (in Blue) identifies outcomes related to housing, formal and informal supports, and other community linkages.

The logic models for both system and non-system connected youth are similar in many areas. For both system-connected and non-system connected youth, one example is that for EngageMENT the P2P Navigators contact the youth and build their trust, yielding short-term outcomes regarding perceived support to long-term outcomes related to resiliency. Another example for both populations is during EmpowerMENT, P2P Navigators are working with the youth on their goals and modeling for the youth, through role play and positive reinforcement, which yields short-term goals related to perceived empowerment and long-term goals related to self-esteem.

However, the logic model also shows difference for the two populations. For example, during Connections, system-connected youth have an activity related to working with system network

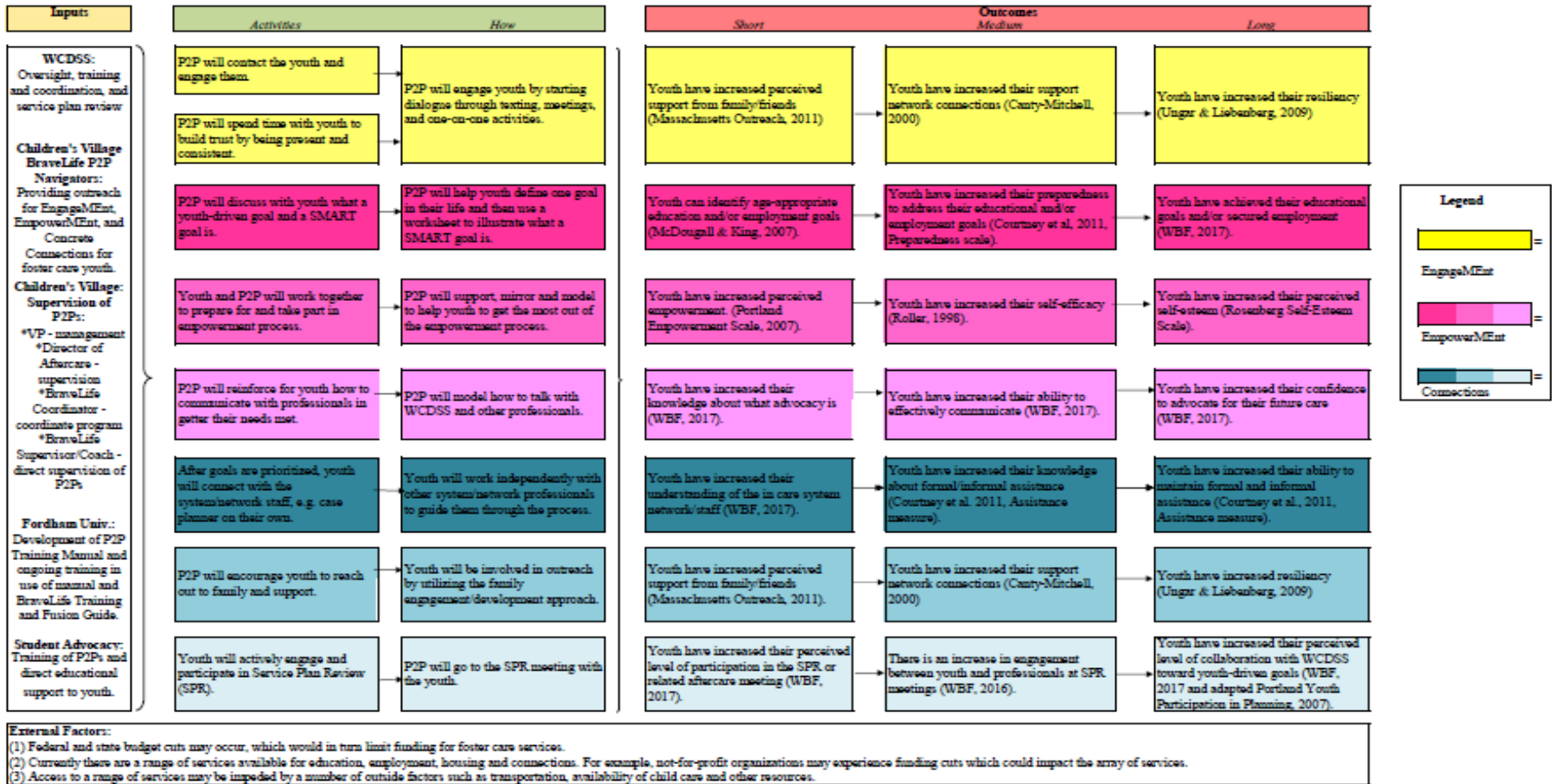
staff, which yields short-term goals about knowing the key staff and who to contact. Yet, for non-system connected youth, they will implement on their own connections for the appropriate linkages that correspond with their goals.

**Program:**

**Westchester Building Futures - The BraveLife Intervention (BLI) for SYSTEM-CONNECTED Youth**

**Situation:**

Westchester Building Futures - The BraveLife Intervention (BLI) is based on the following formula for success: EngageMEnt + EmpowerMEnt + Concrete Connections = Improved Outcomes, which is centered on concrete courageous relationships highlighting shared responsibility and accountability between experienced WCDSS professionals, Peer-2-Peer Navigators, community-based provider allies and the young people that we serve. There is no BraveLife without these key relationships.

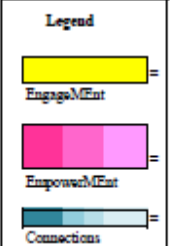


**Program:**

**Westchester Building Futures - The BraveLife Intervention (BLI) for NON-SYSTEM-CONNECTED Youth**

**Situation:**

Westchester Building Futures - The BraveLife Intervention (BLI) is based on the following formula for success: EngageMEnt + EmpowerMEnt + Concrete Connections = Improved Outcome, which is centered on concrete courageous relationships highlighting shared responsibility and accountability between experienced WCDCS professionals, Peer-2-Peer Navigators, community-based provider allies and the young people that we serve. There is no BraveLife without these key relationships.



**External Factors:**

- (1) Federal and state budget cuts may occur, which would in turn limit funding for foster care services.
- (2) Currently there are a range of services available for education, employment, housing and connections. For example, not-for-profit organizations may experience funding cuts which could impact the array of services.
- (3) Access to a range of services may be impeded by a number of outside factors such as transportation, availability of child care and other resources.

## **E. Summary of Formative Evaluation.**

BLI is a new intervention, so our formative evaluation included both program implementation and outcome research questions. We wanted to understand more about the youth's experience in BLI and whether the P2P Navigators could achieve the changes with youth we needed. We focused on short-term outcomes that would indicate the BLI is making the changes in youth's behaviors and knowledge necessary to achieve the longer-term outcomes.

The formative evaluation initially focused on system-connected youth and used the following eligibility criteria: (1) Youth age 14-17 from the White Plains office with an open case or on trial discharge with the WCDSS; (2) Currently involved in foster care agencies, including, Abbott House, Children's Village, Family Services of Westchester, North American Family Institute (NAFI) or with parents/guardian; (3) Receives services in Westchester County; (4) Score 3 or higher on the WBF screening instrument and (4) Able to speak and read English with proficiency sufficient to complete the baseline questionnaire. The formative evaluation was focused on system-connected youth and later expanded to understand issues related to non-system connected youth.

The youth have varying experiences with the child welfare system, with some entering care at an early age and some entering care later. As mentioned above, the youth must be considered at risk for homelessness,<sup>4</sup> based on the results of a WBF 15-item screening instrument.<sup>5</sup> This instrument was developed in YARH – Phase I in partnership with youth, caregivers, and agency representatives. Youth with a criminal history are eligible, provided that they are in compliance with parole requirements and their parole officer supports their involvement, if applicable.

We collected data in several formats to answer our formative evaluation research questions (see Appendix 1-E). First, we used data from the program (administrative data), fidelity checklists from observations by supervisors, and youth case records including goals. We conducted semi-structured interviews with youth and P2P Navigators. Youth completed the WBF survey four times – baseline, 3-, 6-, and 12-month post enrollment – which includes items developed for the BLI and standardized instruments. Appendix 1-D includes the items included in these instruments, as well as the scoring.

While the formative evaluation is still underway, it has since been expanded to system and non-system connected youth ages 14-21. As of December 31, 2019, 67 youth have consented to be part of the BLI. The average age of the youth was 16.85 (SD=1.76), with 59.7% identifying as male, 37.3% identifying as female, and 3.0% identifying as other. With respect to race, 40.3% were African American/Black, 32.8% were Hispanic/Latino, 23.9% were mixed race, and 3.0% were other. The average number of years in foster care was 3.83 years (SD=3.43).

We created a sample size table which summarizes the progress – See Table 1 below. As of December 21, 2019, 137 youth were assessed for eligibility, of which 118 were eligible based on the WBF 15-Item screen score. Therefore, 86.1% of the youth were deemed at-risk of

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<sup>4</sup> The BLI was developed for youth most in need; however, the intervention may be beneficial for a wider spectrum of youth with foster care histories, including those who may not be considered at risk for homelessness.

<sup>5</sup> A score ranging from 0 to 15 is calculated with a higher score indicating greater risk. Sample items include: (1) Have you ever been "couch surfing" for a place to stay?; (2) Have you ever abused alcohol or other substances?; and (3) Have you ever been involved in the juvenile justice system?



homelessness. For those youth who were identified at-risk, 77 were approached to participate and 67 consented to enroll in the BLI.

**Table 1. BLI CASES (as of 12/31/19)**

<b>Data Element</b>	<b>Number</b>
Number of youth assessed for eligibility	137
Number of youth determined to be eligible	118
Number of youth approached for participation in the program	77*
Number of youth who consented to participate	67
Number of youth who enrolled in your program and evaluation	67
Number of youth who completed baseline assessment, if applicable	67
Number of youth who dropped out of programming before complete	22
Left care	
Lost contact	
Decided no longer wished to participate – Letter Listed	16
Became ineligible and removed from services and evaluation – Moved	6
Other	
Number of youth who completed program	16
Graduated	8
Self-graduated <sup>6</sup>	8
Number of youth who completed first follow-up (3 months)	54
Number of youth who were eligible for the first follow-up**	54
Number of youth who completed second follow-up (6 months)	25
Number of youth who were eligible for the second follow-up**	25
Number of youth who completed third follow-up (1 year)	14
Number of youth who were eligible for the third follow-up**	14

\*NOTE: Of the 118 eligible youth, 77 youth were approached for participation. Forty-one youth were not approached to participate due to the following reasons: administrative issues, location issue (outside Westchester County, such as upstate New York), ran away from care, age, or awaiting consent from parent/guardian.

\*\*All youth who were approached to complete the survey were interested in participating. This may be unusual because the youth felt vested and were often in placement/aftercare where they may feel comfortable. Also, an incentive was offered.

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<sup>6</sup> Youth/young adult feels empowered after working with the P2P Navigator to self-graduate without attending all three stages of the BLI intervention. The youth/young adult may feel that s/he has gained substantial support through family and friends. If the P2P Navigator, youth and support network agree, the youth/young adult does not need to continue to the final Connections phase.

As discussed above, there were several questions in the formative evaluation which helped to understand issues related to program evaluation. These questions were initially targeted for youth ages 14-17 in care but were later expanded to include both system and non-system connected youth, ages 14-21.

The program implementation evaluation questions focused on three areas: the average length of time in each component; the perceived quality rating by the P2P Navigator regarding engagement with the youth; and the P2P Navigator's ability to model behaviors with the youth.

To get a snapshot of the amount of time youth spent in each phase, we reviewed cases where youth had completed all three phases as of December 31, 2019. Data indicate that youth spent an average 4.1 months in the EngageMENT phase, 2.5 months in the EmpowerMENT Stage 1 phase, approximately 1.6 months in the EmpowerMENT Stage 2 phase, and 10.1 months in the Connections phase. Across all the phases of the BLI, the P2P Navigators had approximately 3.5 contacts per month with the youth. The breakdown of contacts per month by phase is as follows: 2.7 contacts per month in EngageMENT, 2.4 contacts per month in EmpowerMENT Stage 1, 4.0 contacts per month in EmpowerMENT Stage 2, and 3.5 contacts per month in Connections. The type of contact can include face-to-face, texting, phone calls, and social media. The most common type of contact was texting, followed closely by face-to-face contact.

The average perceived quality rating score was 2.5 (on a scale of 0 to 4), which is relatively positive. The BLI Supervisor completed the checklist to rate the P2P Navigator's ability to model behaviors correctly on a randomly selected number of cases and found that the P2P Navigators successfully modeled behaviors 93% of the time.

The formative evaluation identified several challenges in program implementation. Having the P2P Navigators involved in collecting the informed consents and assent forms delayed the critical discussions between the youth and the P2P Navigator. Also, due to turnover in staffing, the number of contacts per months were lower than anticipated. The BLI program realized that a Coach/Supervisor was needed to help support the P2P Navigators in their work, thereby enabling the BLI Coordinator to focus on the operational aspects of the program. With the addition of the Coach/Supervisor it helped to strengthen the support to the P2P Navigators. Thus, new P2P Navigators were hired. With the new hires the number of contacts per month have increased. In addition, the most common mode of contacts was face-to-face, but the P2P Navigators and the youth rely on texting, phone calls, and social media to support them in their work. Future evaluation will examine this in more detail.



Peggy Kelly, PhD, Research Director, Fordham University:

“Whenever I enter a survey or analyze outcome data associated with the BraveLife Intervention, I always reflect on the individual youth that are being served by the program, and not just the numbers. It brings a great deal of satisfaction to see that the BLI is making a positive, measurable impact on the lives of these young people in areas such as self-advocacy and social support, along with other domains that are key to building a stable and secure future.”

For the outcome data, the following report is based on all youth who participated in the BLI, aged 14-21 through December 31, 2019. The questions focused on perceived support, identification of goals, knowledge of system network/staff, perceived empowerment, self-esteem, self-advocacy, resiliency. These data were from a small sample size. With respect to perceived support, possible scores could range from 12 to 84, with higher scores indicating greater perceived support. Youth displayed an increase in support scores from baseline to 3 months (from 60.3 to 63.1), and again from baseline to 6 months (from 59.3 to 61.2), with the scores at follow-up considered high levels of perceived support. With respect to goals, all youth in the program identified 2 goals. With respect to knowledge of system network/staff, youth showed an improvement in knowing who their case planners and case workers were between baseline and 3 months. Improvements in knowledge of system net/staff was even greater between baseline and 6 months. Over this time period, the percentage of youth who knew their residential case planner rose from 66.7% before working with the P2P to 75.0% at 6 months. In addition, 66.7% of the youth knew their DSS caseworker before working with the P2P Navigator, but this increased to 75.0% at 6 months. Furthermore, while 58.3% of youth knew their attorney before working with the P2P Navigator, 66.7% knew their attorney at 6 months. Unfortunately, knowledge about their judge showed no increase. Nonetheless, the increase in the percentage of the youth who knew their case planner, DSS caseworker, and attorney are important because it helps the youth to know who these individuals are and how they can play a role in their life.

With respect to perceived empowerment, possible scores could range from 7 to 35, with higher scores showing higher levels of empowerment. At baseline, the mean score was 26.8, which increased slightly to 27.2 at 3 months and improved again to 28.5 at 6 months. For self-advocacy, possible scores ranged from 8 to 32, with higher scores representing higher levels of self-advocacy. The average youth rated self-advocacy scores improved from baseline at 24.8, to 27.7 at 3 months, and to 28.9 at 6 months, with both increases being statistically significant. Some of the changes showed small improvements in outcomes. For self-esteem, scores between baseline and 3 months and 6 months remained virtually unchanged. This was anticipated because the changes that impact youth lives may take than longer than six months. Finally, for resiliency, possible scores could range from 12 to 60, with higher scores indicating higher levels of resiliency. Although there was essentially no change in the resiliency scores from baseline to 3 months, scores did increase from 49.8 at baseline to 51.7 at 6 months, although the change was not statistically significant. These data illustrate the importance of understanding the impact of short, medium, and long-term outcomes as identified in the logic model.

We update the implementation and outcome data on a regular basis and will publish them on the WCDSS website.

## F. Partnerships.



Partnerships are essential to the effective functioning of the BLI, and many partner organizations have played a key role in the development and implementation of the intervention.

Westchester Building Futures is the umbrella initiative in which the BLI was developed. The number of partnerships ranged from 4 to 15 over the course of this work. We work closely with four partners related to initial implementation, including

WCDSS, The Children’s Village, Fordham University, and Bravehearts. These four partners are highlighted with an asterisk in Table 2 below. These four partners were valuable in helping to shape the BLI and conduct the research and evaluation.

The other partnerships are summarized in the table below. These partnerships could be replicated by community partners in any other locality.

**Table 2: WBF Partnerships**

<b>Partners/Learning Community Members Needed</b>	<b>Organization in WBF Intervention</b>	<b>Examples of Title/Role</b>	<b>What Provided</b>
Child Welfare Leadership	Westchester County Department of Social Services	Commissioner; First Deputy Commissioner; Child Welfare Directors/Managers/Supervisors/Senior Caseworkers; Deputy Commissioners and Program Directors-Family Investment and Housing Divisions	Leadership and Oversight of BraveLife Intervention focused on Program Innovation + Evaluation
Provider of Services BLI Practice Team*	The Children’s Village	Executive Directors; Vice Presidents; BLI Coordinator, BLI Coach/Supervisor, Peer-2-Peer Navigators	Implementation of the BLI
Credible Messengers and Advocacy*	Bravehearts, M.O.V.E. NY, Inc. The Children’s Village	Co-Founders and Credible Messengers for youth and young adults	Youth Engagement through the lens on youth voice and informed choice
Research Team*	Fordham U. Graduate School of	Principal Investigator; Professors of Social Work; Program Managers and Graduate Students	Data + Evaluation + Implementation Science

	Social Service		
Mental Health Providers and Funders Social Well-Being	Westchester County Dept. of Community Mental Health	Commissioner and Program Directors	Information on mental health services
LGBTQ Advocacy Organizations	Center Lane and Legal Services of Hudson Valley	Program Directors and Legal Directors	LGBT+ Awareness and Education, especially healthy formation of identity and legal advocacy for and with young people
County Based Residential Treatment Centers	The Children's Village; Abbott House; Family Services of Westchester; Rising Ground; North American Family Institute	Executive Directors; Vice Presidents; Program Directors/Managers and Caseworkers	Recruitment and support for the BraveLife Intervention
Education	Student Advocacy	Executive Director and Corps of Education Lawyers and Policy Advocates	Legally-based educational advocacy for and with young people
Employment	Employment + Education Center at The Children's Village	Division Directors and Corps of Employment Advocates	Access to jobs, training and professional development opportunities for and with young people
	Westchester-Putnam Workforce Development Board	Assistant to Executive Director and Workforce Investment Employment Coaches	Posting of WBF job opportunities and access to jobs, training and professional development opportunities for

			and with young people
Housing Services, including housing advocacy	Westhab	Vice President of Housing Programs, Director of Supportive Housing and Senior Caseworkers	Knowledge and access to housing programs for young people transitioning to adulthood
	HOPE Community Services	Executive Director and Housing Director and Managers	Knowledge and access to housing programs for young people transitioning to adulthood, especially young people who identify as members of the LGBT+ plus community
	The Children's Village	Vice Presidents, Division Directors and Housing Directors	Housing for CV staff, including WBF team members; Knowledge and access to housing programs for young people transitioning to adulthood, including young mothers.
	Hearts to Homes	Executive Director	Free brand-new furniture and home furnishing for young people transition to adulthood
State Leadership (as applicable)	NY State Office of Children and Family Services	Commissioner; Deputy Commissioner; Associate Commissioners; Program Directors and Managers	State guidance on NYS requirements
The Courts and The Law	Westchester County Family Court	Chief Administrative Judge and seasoned Family Court Judges	Current and future legal support for system changes
	Attorneys	Deputy County Attorneys; Senior/Supervising County Attorneys; Assistant County Attorneys; Attorneys for Children	Legal system issues

	NY State Division of Criminal Justice Services— Office of Juvenile Justice	Deputy Commissioner and Program Managers including County Probation Commissioners	Critical legal issues
Private Partners: Foundations, “Think & Do Tanks”	Casey Family Programs	Executive Vice President of Child and Family Services; Managing and Senior Directors	Peer to Peer Learning Exchanges
	Westchester Community Foundation	Senior Program Officer	Future planning for funding opportunities
	Center for the Study of Social Policy	Vice President; Senior Associates	Youth Thrive Learning Community
	Mockingbird Society and its Seattle-based Learning Community	Executive Director and Program Coordinators	Peer to Peer Learning Exchanges

**G. Resources.**

The BLI’s core function is having the P2P Navigators work with the youth and build trusting, supportive relationships with them through the engagement process. Once the engagement has been established, the P2P Navigators help the youth gain access to an array of resources, and then assist them in utilizing these resources, which can aid in connecting youth to vital services. Each locality can adapt the intervention according to the resources that are available to the youth in their community.

The major resources include:

1. Employment – The Westchester One Stop Program, Westchester-Putnam Workforce Development Board, and the Children’s Village Education and Employment Center provide valuable job information to help the P2P Navigators collaborate with the youth on building resources and ultimately having the youth connect on their with employment opportunities.
2. Education – In Westchester County, Student Advocacy is the agency that provides educational resources, such as credit checking, outreach to schools, and work with educational partners. The P2P Navigators work with the Student Advocacy staff to build partnerships to benefit the youth.
3. Housing – There are two key agencies, Westhab and HOPE Community that offer the P2P Navigators and the youth resources for housing. The housing case managers are often the first point of contact for the P2P Navigator working with homeless youth.

4. Social Well-Being – As listed above, Bravehearts M.O.V.E and Center Lane often provide resources for at-risk youth.

#### **H. Relationship Between Formative Evaluation and the Intervention**

Originally, the WBF used the three population groups as defined by the Children’s Bureau federal guidelines. The initial formative evaluation focal population centered on the 14–17-year-old youth in care. The number of youth who were 14-17 in care who were included in the dataset was small. From this initial formative evaluation, operational issues were raised. The initial formative evaluation brought to light several operational issues which required changes to the following.

- 1) How the populations were defined.
- 2) How youth were recruited to participate in the BLI.
- 3) How the P2P Navigators were supervised.
- 4) How Empowerment was defined.
- 5) How Connections was initially revised, and then ultimately revised again.

There were five operational changes to the BLI. They include the following:

First, redefining the populations into two groups: system-connected youth and non-system connected youth. The system-connected youth group includes all youth who have a current connection to the foster care system, which includes youth presently in care, as well as youth who have exited the foster care system but are assigned an aftercare worker. System-connected youth draw from all 3 official YARH population groups: in care, out of care, and homeless, as long as they meet the above-mentioned criteria. Non-system connected youth are those youth, ages 14-21, who do not have a current connection to the foster care system. These youth are no longer in care and do not have an aftercare worker and may or may not be homeless.

Second, initially the P2P Navigators approached the youth with consent forms for the BLI. The formative evaluation raised significant concerns because the P2P navigators were spending too much time in obtaining consents from guardians and youth and they were unable to focus on engaging the youth. Therefore, the process was changed that the agency case planners or aftercare worker would approach the youth and guardians regarding consent.

Third, initially the BLI Coordinator had the dual responsibility of supervising the P2P Navigators and collecting and reporting the data needed for the research and evaluation component of the BLI. Handling both responsibilities, especially considering the ongoing need to recruit, hire, and comprehensively train new P2P Navigators, has proven to be extremely challenging at best. The BLI Coordinator has also had to step in and work directly with the youth when there have been vacancies among the team of P2P Navigators. Experience has also shown that the P2P Navigators flourish when they have very close and supportive supervision. Accordingly, the decision was made to create two positions: the BLI P2P Navigator Coach/Supervisor who would work closely with the P2P Navigators, mirroring and modeling for them, and the BLI Coordinator, who would supervise the Coach/Supervisor and oversee the intervention and ensure outreach and program operations.

Fourth, Empowerment was loosely defined. To clarify what occurs in Empowerment, two stages were added. For system-connected youth, Empowerment was divided into two stages, with one



stage focused on the P2P Navigator helping the youth understand the roles and responsibilities of the various people in the system who interact with the youth, and support, mirror, and model skills and behaviors for interacting with the system network/staff. The second stage is a joint meeting of individuals (described later in manual). The purpose of this joint meeting is to continue dialogue and underscore the amount of support the youth has in this process. For non-system connected youth, the P2P Navigator helps the youth focus on their goals.

Lastly, Connections has evolved since the formative evaluation. Initially, Connections was called ConnectME and was envisioned as the P2P Navigators helping the youth to connect to programs and services that align with their goals. After some consideration, however, it was determined that this phase should entail the youth making the connections to programs and services independently. This is in line with the goals of the BLI, which is to have the youth reach out to and make connections with professionals on their own, using the skills that they learned from the P2P Navigators during the empowerment phase.

### **III. The Intervention.**

#### **A. Practitioner Recruitment, Selection, and Training.**

##### **1. Roles and Qualifications of Intervention Staff.**

Note that the same intervention staff work with both populations: System-connected youth and non-system connected youth. Therefore Appendix 3-A and 3-B apply to both populations.



#### **Intervention Staff:**

- **Peer-2-Peer (P2P) Navigators** – are young adults with lived experience in the foster care system, who develop a supportive and trusting relationship with the youth/young adults to help them better understand and navigate through the system network/staff involved in their lives. P2P Navigators have been comprehensively trained to perform their functions effectively and professionally and are fully supported by a network of

experienced social workers and other professionals, including the BraveLife Intervention P2P Navigator Coach/Supervisor, Coordinator, Supervisor and Executive Support.

- **BraveLife Intervention (BLI) P2P Navigator Coach/Supervisor** – is a seasoned professional who has lived experience in the foster care system. The principal role of the BLI P2P Navigator Coach/Supervisor is to supervise the P2P Navigators and provide them with the needed support and guidance so that they can work effectively with the youth/young adults.
- **BraveLife Intervention (BLI) Coordinator** – is a seasoned social work professional who has lived experience in the foster care system. The BLI Coordinator specializes in conducting administrative work, including recruiting, hiring and training of P2P Navigators, and maintaining the documentation needed to conduct and evaluate the intervention.
- **BraveLife Intervention (BLI) Supervisor** – is a social work professional with extensive experience in supervision and support. This supervisor is also a clinician, with specialized training in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) to add an extra layer of support to the BLI P2P Navigator Coach/Supervisor, BLI Coordinator and P2P Navigators. The supervisor conducts DBT with the BLI staff and not the youth receiving the intervention. The supervisor’s training is enriched with DBT skills; however, each locality could determine the supervisor skill set that is most appropriate.
- **Executive Support** – is provided by a member of the executive staff of the Children’s Village to support the work of the P2P Navigators, the BLI P2P Navigator Coach/Supervisor, the BLI Coordinator, and the BLI Supervisor. This ensures that support is forthcoming from the highest levels of the organization for the intervention.
- **System Network/Staff** – are the professionals that the youth interact with in the foster care system, and typically include agency case planners, case managers, and attorneys, as well as other agency/community professionals.

The P2P Navigators should have 12-15 youth in their caseload. The Coach/Supervisor should have no more than 4 P2P Navigators. Job descriptions for P2P Navigator (see Appendix 3-A) and Coach/Supervisor (See Appendix 3-B) are in the appendix.

## 2. Recruitment and Selection Activities.

It is important that both the BLI Coordinator and the Coach/Supervisor, as well as the P2P Navigators, have lived experience in the child welfare system. Accordingly, the job description that was developed in coordination with Human Resources at the Children’s Village, states that eligible candidates must “have personal experience with the child welfare system or the juvenile justice system.” At the heart of the BLI is the notion that the P2P Navigators can build an empathic and trusting relationship with the youth because they have once walked in the youths’ shoes. As a result, only young adults who meet this qualification can be considered to be hired as a P2P Navigator.

In order to attract the best pool of qualified candidates, the job description for the P2P Navigators are posted widely, including on Indeed.com, at the one-stop employment center, and on the Children’s Village website. The job postings are ongoing, as it can take time to locate the best qualified candidates who meet the requirements for the position. Turnover among the P2P Navigators can also be an issue, so it is critical to have a ready pool of candidates to fill openings as they arise in an expedient manner. Recruitment is also pursued by word of mouth to

community agencies that have a connection to the child welfare system, as well as through Bravehearts Inc., the nonprofit organization comprised of current and former youth in foster care in Westchester County. Each locality could build on their network with child welfare agencies to recruit staff with lived experiences.

All resumes are carefully reviewed by the BLI P2P Navigator Coach/Supervisor, the BLI Coordinator, and the BLI Supervisor at the Children's Village. Promising candidates are called in for interviews, where they go through a multi-step process. Initial interviews are held with the BLI P2P Navigator Coach/Supervisor and the BLI Coordinator. Second round interviews are held with the existing P2P Navigators, and the final round is with the BLI Supervisor. The process can take several weeks or more, but this careful selection ensures that the best candidates are hired for the position.

### **3. Training Curriculum and Materials.**

All staff, including the BLI Coordinator, Coach/Supervisor and P2Ps Navigators receive a weeklong training specifically on the work of the BLI before they are assigned to work with the youth. In addition to any organizational orientation, P2P Navigators also receive subsequent refresher trainings every six months. The refresher training reviews ethical issues and boundaries, as well operational issues regarding forms and documentation.

One example of a training module is understanding how to share information. During the training some of the content that is covered is related to self-awareness. The P2P Navigators are made aware that they do not always need to share their stories with others. They are given information that it is acceptable to be comfortable sharing some information and also okay to not share their personal stories. The P2P Navigators are given the understanding that "Your experience is yours to own and tell."

### **4. Initial Support for Intervention Staff.**

All staff, including the BLI Coordinator, Coach/Supervisor and the P2P Navigators have to undergo the comprehensive training process before working with the youth. The training content is included in a supplemental volume entitled "P2P Training Manual" available on the WCDSS website. After the training has been completed, the BLI Coordinator and the BLI P2P Coach/Supervisor work with the P2P Navigators. The Coach/Supervisor partners with the new P2P Navigators on at least two visits with the youth following the initial engagement.

The BLI Coach/Supervisor accompanies the P2P Navigators on the initial visits with the youth, mirroring and modeling behaviors for them through role play and positive reinforcement, until they feel the P2P Navigator is ready to begin interacting with the youth on their own. Modeling encompasses the use of verbal tones and body or non-verbal language on how to interact and speak with a professional to get their message across in a manner that achieves the most effective outcome and positive interactions. This is taught through role playing with the P2P Navigator as well as during interactions that include the P2P Navigator, youth, and another professional. Mirroring is the utilization of the previously taught verbal and non-verbal skills by the youth during their interactions with their P2P Navigator and with other professionals. While the youth are role playing or doing what they have observed from the P2P Navigators, the P2P Navigators

will be also be observing the youth to give feedback on how the youth have been able to mirror what the P2P Navigator has taught them.

The BLI Coordinator and the BLI P2P Coach/Supervisor provide formal, weekly supervision sessions to the P2P Navigators to help them with any issues or problems that may arise, and to give the P2P Navigators ongoing support and guidance. Senior staff at the Children’s Village also provide support, including needed mental health counseling, as this work may trigger trauma responses among the P2P Navigators who may relive some of their own experiences while in the child welfare system. During the weekly supervision sessions, the BLI Coordinator and the BLI P2P Coach/Supervisor also review the P2P Navigators’ progress notes, which they use to give feedback to the P2P Navigators.

In addition, the BLI Coordinator receives supervision from the Children’s Village Director and Vice-President of Community-Based Services on trauma-informed and healing centered supervision, undoing racism (and other “-isms”), and how to best use and support the P2P Navigators. WCDSS leadership, from the commissioner to the senior caseworker, supports the BLI implementers and evaluators of the BLI. If a challenge arises involving a young person that the BLI serves, WCDSS team leaders can quickly organize a solutions-centered team meeting that includes the BLI Coordinator, P2P Coach/Supervisor and key WCDSS child/youth welfare decision makers. The concrete support from the grass-tops to the grassroots is a key ingredient to BLI’s success.

The P2P Navigators have also been trained on the use of the BLI Database, in which they record and keep track of all their interactions with the youth. As part of the training, the P2P Navigators enter at least two cases into the database, and these are checked over by their supervisor to ensure that they are using the database correctly. On a weekly basis, the P2P Navigators input their progress notes into the database. Each contact with the youth, whether it be face-to-face, over the phone, by text, or through social media, is recorded in a progress note.



Alexis Santiago-Autar, LMSW,  
Division Director for Westchester  
Community Based Services, The  
Children’s Village:

“I am so honored to say, in my time working with the BLI, I have recognized that the peer navigator is more than a support to our young people in foster care, they are a symbol of hope for the future.”

## **5. Ongoing Support for Intervention Staff.**

The BLI P2P Coach/Supervisor holds a weekly individual supervisory session with each P2P Navigator to review progress with all youth and address system obstacles. During these sessions the Coach/Supervisor works with the P2P Navigator to troubleshoot issues and case problems. In addition, sometimes a P2P Navigator has a concern with a specific case. The Coach/Supervisor will also be available as a sounding board and provide alternative suggestions for the P2P Navigators and youth to address the specific situation. The BLI Coordinator and the Coach/Supervisor meet with the Children's Village Executive Leadership Team on a regular basis for training, coaching, debriefing and supervision.

The BLI P2P Coach/Supervisor and BLI Coordinator are proactive in making sure that the P2P Navigator follows up on steps that are agreed upon in supervisory sessions, and the P2P Navigator understands when issues arise that require more than once a week discussion.

The BLI Coordinator and the BLI Supervisor offer the P2P Navigators clinical support, in which triggers within the work are discussed, mindfulness and other skills are reviewed, and self-care is discussed and reinforced.

The BLI P2P Coach/Supervisor and the BLI Coordinator model how to interact with youth and professionals, and coach and teach the P2P Navigators about professional development, work ethics, expectations, and help define their roles as P2P Navigators. This is done by using a specific case examples and asking the P2P Navigator to reflect on two possible options that occur if suggestions are implemented.

### **B. Identification/Enrollment of Youth.**

#### **1. Target Population.**

The eligibility criteria for participation in the BLI differ by the population of youth. There are, however, two commonalities for both populations in terms of eligibility:

- 1) The youth must currently consider Westchester County "home", meaning they reside in Westchester County, and have been involved in the Westchester County child welfare system. In both populations, the youth may or may not be homeless.
- 2) The youth must have scored a 3 or higher on the WBF 15-item screen, to be considered "at risk."

***Population 1: System Connected Youth*** - In Westchester County, we have defined system-connected youth as youth who have a formal connection to the WCDSS system in the form of a worker, regardless of age or status of their child welfare case. The eligibility criteria are as follows:

- youth ages 14-21 who are currently in care with an open case and a case manager and/or case planner; and
- youth 14-21 who are currently in aftercare, which means that they have been discharged from care and they are no longer under the custody of the WCDSS. Rather than a case manager or case planner, these youth have an aftercare worker assigned to them.

**Population 2: Non-System Connected Youth** - In Westchester County, we have defined non-system-connected youth as youth who are no longer formally connected to the system and may or may not be homeless. The eligibility criteria are as follows:

- youth ages 14-21 who are currently out of care, which means that they have been discharged from in-care and they are no longer under the custody of the WCDSS; and
- youth are not assigned a case manager, agency case planner, or an aftercare worker. They do not have an aftercare worker because either they have already been out of care for two years (which is the normal limit for aftercare services), or they choose not to have an aftercare worker.

For either population, if the youth has never been a part of the child welfare system in Westchester County, or if they no longer live or receive services in Westchester County, then they are ineligible for the intervention. Several system-connected youth have been deemed ineligible for the BLI because they are in placements outside of Westchester County.

## **2. Referral, Recruitment and Screening Process.**

The referral, recruitment and screening process are different for the two populations.

**Population 1: System Connected youth** - Eligible youth are referred and recruited by Westchester County DSS case managers, agency case planners, or aftercare workers.

To inform these workers about the BLI, and to encourage them to refer youth to the program, the BLI Coordinator and BLI Coach/Supervisor meet with the workers at least once a month and present information about the BLI to them. The BLI Coordinator maintains an open dialogue with the workers about the BLI and is available to answer their questions and concerns.



Through a random selection process, the youth are identified. The random selection process is best used when you have a limited number of P2P Navigators to operate the BLI. At least every quarter, the BLI Coordinator and Fordham Principle Investigator participate in meetings with WCDSS case workers, agency case planners, or aftercare workers, to train and/or review how to fill out the WBF 15-item screen. Those youth that score a 3 or higher are considered at risk and deemed eligible for the BLI. The workers then approach the youth that were eligible and ask them if they would be interested in taking part in the intervention. The workers give the youth a brief description of the BLI, and also let them know that the intervention staff is available to answer any questions or concerns that they may have about the intervention.

**Population 2: Non-System Connected youth** - The referral and recruitment process for these youth is less structured, since they no longer have a worker assigned to their care. In some cases, workers who have been assigned to these youth in the past refer the youth. In other cases, referrals are handled more informally, such as through word of mouth from youth who are

already involved in the program, through the BLI Coordinator or BLI P2P Coach/Supervisor presentations to youth at Bravehearts meetings or visits to homeless shelters. The BLI Coordinator and the BLI P2P Coach/Supervisor handle most of the recruitment for the Non-system connected youth.

Youth who are homeless are automatically considered at risk and are eligible for the BLI. The youth are asked to complete the screen as part of the baseline questionnaire.

The questions on the WBF 15-item screen (see Appendix 1-D) are the same for both populations, whether it is completed by the worker or the youth.

### **3. Consent Process.**

This research study required university Institutional Review Board approval (IRB). The consent and assent process for the study is similar for both populations (see paragraph below). The main difference is that for system-connected youth, the DSS case managers, agency care planners, or aftercare workers attain the consents from the youth. For the non-system connected youth, the BLI Coordinator or the P2P BLI Coach/Supervisor ordinarily attains consents.

Consent Process:

Youth who are deemed eligible for the BLI according to the screening process described above are approached and told about the BLI and assured that their participation is strictly voluntary and in no way impedes or changes any of the services they are currently receiving. If the youth express interest in participating, staff work to obtain consent and assent.

The Fordham consent forms provide basic information about the BLI, what is entailed in their participation, who is involved in the intervention, and the benefits and incentives that they will receive for their participation. For youth under 18, the parent/guardian must sign a consent form, and the youth must sign an assent form. For youth 18 and over, the youth signs the consent form.

Given the P2P Navigators and their supervisors are Children's Village employees, there are additional consent requirements from Children's Village to participate in services provided by their staff.

For research purposes, once the consent forms are signed, the youth are given the baseline questionnaire to complete. They receive \$10 after completion of the questionnaire.

Consent and assent forms are included in Appendix 2-A and 2-B.

## **C. Operationalized Intervention.**

### **1. Core Components**

In the initial development of the Westchester Building Futures (WBF) initiative, there were substantial discussions regarding philosophy of the BLI. In order to address this, the Guiding Principles of the BraveLife Intervention were developed. These principles are the same for both population groups (see Appendix 1-A). For example, one principle is to ensure Housing First.

The Housing First principle ensures that a homeless/houseless individual or household's first and primary need is to obtain safe and stable housing in a permanent nurturing environment. Other issues that may affect the household can and should be addressed once housing is obtained.

The following are the Core Components of the BraveLife Intervention. Differences according to the population groups are noted in each of the phases.

**EngageMEnt:** EngageMEnt is reaching out to and building positive and trusting relationships with at-risk youth/young adults, leading to their willing participation in the next component of the intervention. For non-system connected youth who are currently homeless, as a matter of urgency, the P2P Navigator will initially help the youth connect to a shelter or other housing option, and then focus on helping the youth make progress towards securing stable housing as soon as possible through housing referrals and service resources, and then remain safe and stably housed.



Natasha Bazil, P2P Navigator, The Children's Village:

“For me, being a peer navigator is very rewarding. I've worked in the field for a couple of years now and when I became part of BraveLife, I didn't know what to expect; I just knew that they wanted someone with life experience. I did not know that I would love my job so much, being able to help the youth in the community and navigate them through the systems and show them how to speak to professionals, model for them how to be a professional, and follow up with them after

In EngageMEnt, the P2P Navigator establishes a trusting working relationship with the youth.

- P2P Navigator has the skills to develop an authentic relationship in which the youth comes to see the P2P Navigator as a trustworthy, empathic, and consistent presence.
- P2P Navigator understands the cultural, social, and environmental issues that the youth is faced with.
- P2P Navigator and youth have at least 2 contacts per month. This component averages approximately 4 months.

### **EmpowerMEnt (Stage 1):**

For both populations, there are two areas that are consistently carried out during Stage 1: (1) working with the youth on what a goal is; (2) and modeling and mirroring behaviors.

The P2P Navigator:



- has the necessary knowledge of the youth’s circumstances, desires, capabilities, and current support network to begin to help the youth to establish and achieve goals.
- teaches youth what a goal is.
- supports the youth in developing their goals.
- helps the youth use the goals to focus their work.
- helps strengthen communication skills by support and modeling.
- models positive listening skills such as reflective listening and two-way conversations.
- models positive non-verbal communication skills, such as eye contact, “leaning into conversations”, and friendly greetings.

For system-connected youth, the P2P Navigator will provide concrete knowledge on the roles and responsibilities of the various people in the system who interact with the youth and support, mirror, and model skills and behaviors for interacting with the system network/staff. For system-connected youth, the P2P Navigator can clearly explain to the youth the roles and responsibilities of the system network/staff (e.g., agency case planners).

For non-system connected youth, the P2P Navigator provides knowledge on the roles and responsibilities of the various people in the community (e.g. employment services) who interact with the youth.

### **EmpowerMENT (Stage 2):**

For both populations, EmpowerMENT Stage 2 includes a meeting with the P2P Navigator, youth, and at least one community professional, family member or friend. The purpose of this process is to enable the youth to focus on their strengths and goals, and to gain the support of professionals and family and friends in achieving these goals.

The P2P Navigator:

- understands and reviews with the youth the many facets of a successful partner meeting, such as punctuality, proper appearance, and good manners.
- coaches the youth on appropriate communication styles with professionals, such as tone of voice, and emphasizes that how something is said can affect the way a professional hears the youth and could impact the outcome desired.
- and the youth review the youth’s personal strengths and challenges in order to ensure that they are discussing achievable goals with professionals.
- and youth rehearse for the meeting through role play, and the P2P Navigator models appropriate active listening skills, such as eye contact and verbal feedback.

Following the meeting, the P2P Navigator and youth effectively explore particularly troubling issues that may arise in the debrief discussion.

For system-connected youth, the P2P Navigator and youth consider adjustments to youth’s goals based on outcome of meeting with system network/staff. The P2P Navigator effectively debriefs youth on meeting with system network/ staff or other professionals and probes beyond the youth’s surface reactions to the meeting to fully understand the youth’s reactions.

For non-system connected youth, the P2P Navigator reinforces positive results of meeting and to the extent possible ensures that the youth remains optimistic about their ability to achieve their goals.

## **Connections:**

For both populations, the P2P is working with the youth to ensure the youth will make a connection on their own to appropriate resource(s) in the community that correspond with the youth's goals.

For system-connected youth, the youth, with the encouragement of the P2P Navigator, will collaborate with the case planner or aftercare worker to assure that linkages are in place so that the youth can meet their goals. The P2P Navigator takes a step back to assure that the connection is solidified and concrete so the youth can achieve their goals independently.

For non-system connected youth, the P2P Navigator will encourage the youth to collaborate with professionals, particularly in the areas of education, employment, and housing, that align with their goals and reduce the potential of becoming or remaining homeless.

## **Graduation**



If the youth have progressed through all phases of the BLI, they may be ready for graduation. First, the P2P Navigator and youth will review the connections made over the course of their work together and discuss additional steps youth can take to maintain these connections. Next, the P2P Navigator will meet with both the BLI Coordinator and Coach/Supervisor to review the youth's progress. Finally, the youth and P2P Navigators will discuss the planned graduation and the follow-up steps that are needed after graduation, including the fact the P2P Navigator will

remain an ongoing resource. In addition, the youth will also be asked how they want to celebrate their graduation.

There are some youth who may choose to self-graduate because they have identified success in the program without having gone through all its phases.

See Appendix 2-F for sample graduation certificate.

## **2. Behaviors of Practitioners.**

The behaviors expected of the P2P Navigators and their supervisors are the same whether they are working with system-connected or non-system connected youth. To help guide their behaviors, and to set appropriate expectations, the P2P Navigators receive formal training on issues such as strategic sharing, boundaries/limitations, and ethics.

Boundaries/limitations is one example of expected behaviors that are essential for P2P Navigators. For example, P2P Navigators have to know that they must use professional behavior

when working with youth. With respect to limitations, it is important to understand the importance of professional demeanor when actively advocating for youth with child welfare staff. There are set boundaries for matters such as mandated reporting of a serious situation, confidentiality, and professional work hours; however we also allow for flexibility to push the system to look at the youth we work with differently and connect with the youth through youth culture and language. We are able to meet the youth where they are and then help them learn skills needed to interact appropriately with professionals. In addition, they should remember that they also need to respect their relationship with the youth and not interact with the youth the same way as they would with a “best friend.” Finally, the P2P Navigators have to manage their own interactions and emotions and communicate in a respectful tone during all interactions with both the youth and other staff they work with.

The full P2P Training Manual is available on the WCDSS website.

### **3. Assessments/Surveys, Risk Screens.**

The assessment/survey used in the baseline, 3-month, 6-month, and 1-year questionnaires are included in Appendix 1-D.

Candace Mercado, MSW, Service Analyst, Fordham University:

“I have the opportunity to not only work on the research aspect of the project, but also have a chance to meet and work with the P2P Navigators. The P2P Navigators work with the youth to ensure they succeed and accomplish their goals, by focusing on engagement, empowerment and connections, which essentially builds the bridge to success. One important thing that I will never forget is how often the P2P Navigators tell the youth, ‘they are not alone.’ They also stress that giving feedback is just as important as receiving feedback from the youth, and as one person put it: ‘Don’t just give a youth a seat at the table but rather allow them to speak.’”



### **B. Measuring and Ensuring Fidelity.**

To measure fidelity, we have developed the following table to explain how we assess fidelity of the BLI.

**Table 3. Fidelity Components**

<b>Implementation Fidelity</b>	<b>Monitoring</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
1. Hiring qualified staff.	Review the credentials of staff hired as both P2P Navigator roles and supervisory roles to see that they correspond with the job description.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% of the P2Ps employed with lived experience in the child welfare system.</li> <li>• 100% of the BLI Coordinator and Coach/Supervisor have lived experience in the child welfare system.</li> </ul> <p><b>Each locality should identify essential hiring qualification for staff which can include</b> empathy, positive attitude, follow-up, timeliness in work, leadership etc.</p>
2. Providing consistent training of P2P Navigator staff.	When new P2P Navigators are hired, and at 6-month intervals, to ensure that the P2P training has been completed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% of the interventionists complete BLI training.</li> <li>• The BLI Coordinator and Coach/Supervisor do observe youth/P2P Navigator interaction following the training and at regular intervals.</li> </ul>
3. Providing quality supervision.	The Executive Staff members will monitor the BLI Coordinator and Coach/Supervisor to assess in the yearly performance evaluation that the supervision is acceptable by the institution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The BLI Coordinator and Coach/Supervisor will receive a “successful performance” rating on their yearly performance evaluation.</li> </ul>
4. Enroll “at risk” youth for both population groups.	Assure that all youth have been screened using the WBF Screen and are identified as “at-risk.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% of total referrals of youth meeting at-risk standards per WBF 15-item screen.</li> </ul>
5. Ensuring adequate caseloads.	Every month the BLI Coordinator will assess the caseload status of each P2P Navigator and adjust the caseload as needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intervention staff caseloads (the number of youth with which each P2P Navigator works) should be between 12-15.</li> <li>• Supervision caseloads (the number of P2P Navigators who report to the supervisor) should be a maximum of 4.</li> </ul>
6. Ensuring dosage and duration.	Assure youth have at least 2 contacts per month with the P2P Navigator in each phase.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mean number of contacts per each phase of the intervention.</li> </ul>

	<p>Each youth will be monitored to determine if they are in one of the 3 components for more than 6 months at a time. If so, then the P2P Navigator will meet with their supervisory team.</p> <p>Assure youth progress and graduate through all 3 phases.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mean number of months that youth spend in each phase of the intervention.</li> <li>• 50% of the youth have moved to the next phase within a 6-month period.</li> <li>• 50% of youth who successfully graduated from the BLI after one year.</li> <li>• One-year average duration in the BLI for those leaving the intervention (both for those successfully graduating and for those being placed on the letter list).</li> </ul>
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For future implementation, the data sources for the implementation and intervention fidelity are as follows:

- Youth progress through phases of the intervention.
- Type of contacts between youth and P2P Navigator by area (education, employment, housing, permanent connections, and social and emotional well-being).
- Monthly caseload report by BLI coordinator.
- Incidence reports from BLI Coordinator.



**Dosage:**

An essential element is regular contact between the youth and the P2P Navigator, at least twice monthly. It is important to remember that youth are often at different places in their lives – some may be in school, others may be employed, and some may be unemployed and/or homeless. Yet, regular contact is essential to engagement, empowerment and connections. To measure dosage, the team (WCDSS, Children’s Village, and Fordham University) will review each case to ensure that there are at two contacts per month.

**Duration:**

For both population groups, the intervention staff will identify the youth in each phase and data are collected on the amount of time spent in each phase, as well as when youth are ready to graduate. All youth should have progressed through each phase for graduation, with the exception that some youth may choose to self-graduate because they have identified success in the program without having gone through all its phases.

The fidelity checklist is included in Appendix 2-C.

## 1. Conducting Fidelity Assessments.

Data for all BLI youth are entered into the BLI Database System developed by Fordham University. This database system provides regular reports. Children’s Village and Fordham University review monthly reports that are generated. At least twice a month, the WBF BLI Blueprint team meets to review progress with the BLI and troubleshoot problems. The Fordham University’s Research Director and Children’s Village BLI Coordinator review each active case in the BLI database. The BLI Blueprint Team reviews fidelity assessments.

To assure that each of the staff members that are conducting the fidelity assessment are trained, the Fordham Research Director and the BLI Coordinator will provide ongoing training sessions for fidelity and use of the BLI Database. These training sessions are held with core staff to strengthen and reinforce engagement, empowerment and connection skills. The BLI Database Manual was developed for part of the training protocol.

The BLI Database Manual is included in Appendix 2-D.

## C. Continuous Quality Improvement Framework.

The Continuous Quality Improvement Framework is based on the premise that engaging youth in a trusting relationship with the P2P Navigators is essential. Next, the BLI focuses on empowering the youth so that they will be able to connect to resources on their own. Data are collected at regular intervals to follow youth as they progress through the BLI. Continuous review ensures that we are keeping track of the youth at each point and that we are following the specific guidelines. These efforts assure that youth do not fall through the gap. The BLI Database is a vehicle that allows us to run reports to follow the youth progress on a regular basis.

**Table 4. Continuous Quality Improvement**

CQI Phase	Required Evidence	Examples of Relevant Evidence
Define the problem	Youth at risk are being served	1. All youth meet score above 3 on the WBF 15-item screen
Understand underlying conditions	Data were collected from youth in foster care in Westchester from 2008 and 2009, when youth were 9-16. Information was gathered from Child Care System, Multistate Foster Care Data Archive, OCFS Data Warehouse, Welfare Review and Tracking System, and Homelessness Management Information System.	1. Study on the prevalence and patterns of risk and protective factors associated with homelessness in Westchester County. Copy of report is in Appendix 1-B. 2. The greatest risk factors for homelessness were having 3 or more moves while in care, movement 2 or more times in/out of care, juvenile delinquency history, in need of supervision, last

		<p>placement institution, runaway/AWOL history.</p> <p>3. The periodic youth surveys ask questions such as the number of placements, juvenile delinquency, if they had been placed in an institutional setting, and if they had runaway, as well as other risk factors for homelessness.</p>
Identify a solution and plan for implementation	The youth and the P2P Navigator have developed an empathic and trusting relationship as part of the Engagement process. The youth has met with the P2P Navigator, agency representatives who align with their goals, and others, including family members, to work on their goals, as part of the Empowerment process. The youth can independently make connections to needed professionals and resources in the community that help them achieve their goals as part of the connections process.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The BLI Database collects progress notes which record every contact with the youth at each phase of the intervention.</li> <li>2. The BLI Database keeps track of the time the youth spends in each phase of the BLI, which community partners the youth connects with, and the goals that the youth is working on.</li> <li>3. For each contact recorded in the BLI Database, the P2P Navigators rate the quality of the contact, on a scale of 0-4.</li> </ol>
Implement the solution	The BLI has 3 phases: Engagement, Empowerment, and Connections. The supervisors of the P2P Navigators ensure that the BLI is being implemented with fidelity by adhering to a fidelity checklist.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All cases have progressed through all three phases.</li> </ol>
Test the solution and revise approach as needed	Youth who have progressed through all three phases of the BLI (Engagement, Empowerment, and Connections), and have demonstrated progress on working towards their goals are able to graduate from the BLI.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The youth has taken the initiative on their own to reach out to professionals or resources in the community which correspond with their goals, particularly in the areas of housing, education, employment, and social and emotional well-being.</li> </ol>