

PROJECT SAFE

provided by YouthCare in partnership with KCSARC

Project SAFE: A review of a pilot phone-based clinical consultation program for parents and caregivers in King County

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2013, YouthCare, in partnership with King County Sexual Assault Resource Center (KCSARC), officially launched implementation of the Project SAFE pilot in King County. Project SAFE was created by Cocoon House in Snohomish County and, in 2006, was recognized by the National Alliance to End Homelessness as a best practice and an exemplary model for youth homelessness prevention programming, because it was one of the few programs nationally to adopt a family systems perspective.

We had this growing realization that kids are connected to their families no matter what, and that when kids turn 18 and age out, they often end up going back to their families... even if they don't have great relationships. So...how do we strengthen those relationships? Project SAFE is just an expansion of that idea. [We] have a quick, easily accessed, free resource that parents could involve themselves with in the moment that they need that support.

—YouthCare staff

In line with Cocoon House's model, the Project SAFE pilot is designed to enable parents and caregivers of at-risk youth to seek support and services in advance of their youth running away or becoming homeless. The program's two major goals are: 1) prevent youth homelessness; and 2) promote healthier family functioning.

Project SAFE's core components include an intake call; Phone A, a 90-minute clinical consultation with a counselor; and Phone B, a brief follow-up call one week later. During Phone A, the counselor and parent/caregiver create an action plan, with specific action steps for both

the parent/caregiver and youth, to support the parent/caregiver in strengthening family management and parenting skills, understanding adolescent development, and improving communication skills. The counselor also provides referrals to YouthCare and KCSARC programs, as well as external services. During Phone B, the counselor assesses the parent/caregiver and youth's progress on the action plan, including follow-through with referrals. The counselor works with the parent/caregiver to provide support in reflecting on successes and challenges and make adjustments in the action plan, as needed and appropriate. In addition to these core components, Project SAFE offers psycho-educational parenting classes to help parents and caregivers build a better understanding of adolescent development, recognize different communication styles, and learn effective parenting strategies (e.g., positive discipline) for dealing with their youth.

In July 2013, YouthCare engaged Cardea to conduct an independent evaluation of the development and implementation of the Project SAFE pilot.

This evaluation had three objectives:

1. Provide an overview of the development and implementation of the Project SAFE pilot from April 1, 2013 – September 30, 2014
2. Increase understanding of the extent to which the Project SAFE pilot is meeting outputs and short-term outcomes, as outlined in the project logic model
3. Describe efforts to build YouthCare and KCSARC's capacity to use data to inform mid-course corrections and to document program impacts

The review examined data collected by Project SAFE staff during 41 intake calls, 25 unique phone consultations, and eight (8) follow-up calls.

DISCUSSION

There has been significant investment in development and implementation of this pilot, and YouthCare and KCSARC are positioned for success

With support from funders and Cocoon House, YouthCare and KCSARC successfully launched the Project SAFE pilot. YouthCare and KCSARC have leveraged their respective expertise in working with homeless youth and young adults and in working with families to begin supporting youth and their parents/caregivers through Project SAFE. In addition, KCSARC is now using data collection tools that will facilitate ongoing monitoring and evaluation of Project SAFE.

Continued outreach and marketing will be critical to Project SAFE's success

The Project SAFE pilot has been in place for about a year and a half. Cocoon House has offered Project SAFE for more than a decade and, as a well-known resource in Snohomish County, provides about 300 consultations per year through Project SAFE. After YouthCare hired a part-time Community Awareness Coordinator, outreach dramatically increased, and there was a corresponding increase in Project SAFE's overall call volume, as well as an increase in the number of completed Phone A consultations. Continued investments in outreach and marketing will be critical to the success of Project SAFE in King County.

Supportive services are important to offer alongside Project SAFE

Currently, YouthCare and KCSARC only have resources to offer four psycho-educational parenting classes per quarter. In addition, YouthCare continues to explore ways to serve parents and caregivers of youth at risk of homelessness, as well as the homeless youth and young adults with whom it has traditionally worked. In contrast, Cocoon House has the infrastructure to offer a range of services for parents and caregivers that facilitate linkage to services. Continued investments in supportive services will contribute to the success of Project SAFE in King County.

Project SAFE supports a diversity of families facing serious challenges

Most Project SAFE consultations were with female callers, and nearly half of callers for whom data were available were people of color. Project SAFE primarily served youth age 13-18 years. More than half were youth of color. Nearly three-quarters of youth had run away or left home at least once, and nearly half of youth had experienced sexual assault.

Callers report distress, due to ongoing concerns about their youth

Callers reported extremely high frustration and minimal to low belief that their youth would be able to stay in the home. Most reported several distinct concerns about their youth, including problems at school, behavioral concerns, and mental health issues. More than one-third of callers reported mental health issues, and nearly one-quarter reported substance abuse issues.

Despite ongoing concerns, callers have positive aspirations for their youth

Over half of callers said they wanted their youth to succeed in school. Nearly three-quarters indicated that they wanted their youth to have a happy, healthy, or fulfilling life. Three-quarters of callers said they wanted a better relationship with their youth.

Callers' outlook improved, and there was significant progress on action plans

At the end of Phone A, nearly all callers reported being more hopeful, and all reported being less frustrated than at the beginning of the call. While Phone B data were limited, nearly all callers reported greater hope, and all reported less frustration than they had at the beginning of Phone A. In addition, all callers reported progress toward at least one of the planned action steps for them and their youth, and half had made progress toward all of the planned action steps.

CONCLUSION

YouthCare and KCSARC are positioned for success with Project SAFE in King County. Despite the challenges and short duration of the Project SAFE pilot, YouthCare and KCSARC staff were already able to tell stories about the positive impact of Project SAFE.

What makes Project SAFE different is that it's a brief intervention and that's unique... something the community really needs. [We're] meeting families literally where they're at.... We're free, flexible, and accessible. It's really valuable.

— YouthCare staff

While Project SAFE is still in a developmental phase, Cocoon House's success in fostering family cohesion and preventing youth homelessness suggests that YouthCare and KCSARC's implementation may yield similar results in King County. In addition, information from a variety of sources suggest that Project SAFE in King County have potential to be cost saving. A cost-benefit analysis conducted by New Avenues for Youth found that \$5.04 is saved for every dollar spent on prevention and early intervention for homelessness. Anecdotal data, including stories about family reunification, suggest that the Project SAFE pilot has yielded positive results for youth and their parents/caregivers. In contrast, at YouthCare, the cost of an average shelter stay for a youth under 18 years of age is approximately \$3,000, far less than the cumulative costs of the many adverse outcomes of chronic homelessness, estimated to range from \$7,500 to \$40,000 per person, per year.[†]

Given the results to date, we anticipate that Project SAFE will continue to contribute to parents'/caregivers' desire and effort to reconcile conflict and improve their relationship with their youth and support the overall goals of King County's Homeless Youth and Young Adult Initiative.

[†] Please see references 10 and 12-15 in the full report.