

# Programs for Foster Youth Transitioning to Adulthood (FYTA) Evaluation

FINAL MID-EVALUATION REPORT

SUBMITTED BY:

YUK C. PANG, PHD

POND EZRA, BA

ANNA STERN, BA

JUNE SIMON, MSW

TIMOTHY ROSS, PHD

ACTION RESEARCH

318 5<sup>TH</sup> STREET

BROOKLYN, NY 11215

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## Executive Summary

This report provides a progress update on the first two years of Action Research's independent evaluation of two programs serving foster youth transitioning to adulthood (FYTA), which was funded beginning in April 2019 by the Criminal Justice Investment Initiative (CJII) of the Manhattan District Attorney's Office (DANY) in New York City (NYC). Every year an estimated 600 young adults, of whom over 80 percent are youth of color, exit NYC foster care without a legal permanent family arrangement on the basis of age. The programs evaluated, Graham Windham's Graham SLAM (Support, Lead, Achieve, Model) and The Door's Bronx Academy and Manhattan Academy Plus (MAP), offer youth aging out of foster care in NYC personalized support through mentorship, coaching, and youth-driven service provision, respectively. This mid-evaluation report describes recent developments in the policies, programs, and context that impact FYTA in NYC, an update on evaluation activities from Years 1 and 2, mid-evaluation recommendations, and methodology modifications needed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the evaluation began, supports available to FYTA increased due to greater funding in NYC as evidenced by successful coalition-based advocacy for the Fair Futures initiative, and at the federal level, in emergency response dollars in the CARES Act. At the same time, the pandemic left many FYTA in NYC and across the United States disconnected from services, schooling, job opportunities, and social relationships, with damaging effects on nearly all aspects of youths' lives.

The research team focused on Years 1 and 2 on the process elements of the evaluation and securing data use agreements needed for the outcome evaluation. The team developed instruments for the process and outcome evaluations, obtained approvals from a private Institutional Review Board (IRB), the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS), the Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI) IRB, and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). The team also negotiated data use agreements with Graham and The Door, as well as New York City agencies. Despite pandemic-related delays in some evaluation activities, the team conducted over two dozen interviews with program staff at both service providers to understand ongoing programming as well as the impact of the pandemic on program implementation in Years 1 and 2. The research team obtained program

materials, explored program data from each program, and analyzed administrative foster care data provided by ACS.

**Preliminary findings:**

1. FYTA experience many adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and face mental health challenges and socioeconomic challenges that impact their program outcomes.
  - a. FYTA are exposed to a high number of ACEs, and Graham SLAM and The Door youth reflect this broader population.
  - b. Staff report that ACEs and related mental health challenges affect participants' ability to benefit from program services and their attainment of successful education, employment, and housing outcomes.
  - c. Staff members do not feel equipped to adequately handle participants' mental health challenges without the support of additional trainings and staffed mental health professionals.
  - d. Youth are at risk for involvement in the criminal justice system due to ACEs, racial bias, and a lack of income or opportunity, and therefore also need both programs' core services to help lead independent and fulfilling lives.
2. Staff at both programs face several engagement challenges when working and connecting with older youth.
  - a. Staff reported in the first year of the evaluation the need for additional training to understand the context of foster care and to sharpen youth engagement strategies. Graham SLAM staff received extensive additional training through Fair Futures in 2020; in late 2020 the research team connected staff from The Door to Fair Futures trainers.
  - b. Both agencies faced enormous impediments to staying in contact and engaging with youth during the pandemic due to loss of in-person contact, limited technology capacity on the part of staff and youth, and the destabilizing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Program staff responded to youths' needs during the pandemic by creating virtual workshops and services aimed at meeting concrete needs, helping youth navigate healthcare access challenges, and celebrating youths' success.

4. Overall, both The Door and Graham SLAM exhibited successful program implementation. The Door locations served 478 youth between 2018-2021 and Graham SLAM served 403 youth between 2014-2020, both programs were fully staffed, and the staff demonstrated a strong commitment to working with youth.

**Preliminary recommendations** to improve the quality and accessibility of programs' services to support youth better in reaching their goals were identified from interview data with program staff, our analysis of administrative and program data, and our reading and work in the field. These recommendations include:

1. Expand youths' access to culturally sensitive mental health services and supports as a key element of programming. This includes continuing the teletherapy services initiated during the pandemic as a permanent option, available to all youth.
2. Maintain flexible remote programming as a viable alternative and/or supplement to in-person services.
3. Match youth to coaches whose engagement strategies and personal coaching style align with the youth's needs, and more broadly, resolve recurring engagement problems particular to their respective program models. Specifically, The Door should create a system to keep participant contact information organized and updated to prevent communication barriers.

Moving forward, we will focus our data collection and analytic capacity on the outcome evaluation for the final evaluation report, which consists of two components: [1] administrative data analysis of major youth outcomes, and [2] survey data collection/analyses and program youth interviews.

## Introduction

Each year in the United States, approximately 20,000 youth “age out” of foster care without a legal permanent family arrangement—about 1 in every 12 exits (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). In New York City (NYC), the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) estimates that roughly 600 young adults age out of the foster care system annually, of whom over 80 percent are youth of color (NYC Administration for Children’s Services, 2016). Youth who age out of foster care face significant challenges, including a heightened risk of experiencing homelessness, violence, food insecurity, unemployment, poverty, physical and mental health diagnoses, lack of access to healthcare, and involvement in the criminal justice system (Ahrens et al., 2014; Barth, 1990; Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Kelly, 2020; Rosenberg & Kim, 2018; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). Preventive services in NYC and other jurisdictions are diverting youth from coming into foster care, and other initiatives are lessening the number of youths exiting foster care without legal family permanency (Jordan et al., 2020). The percent of youths experiencing homelessness after exiting NYC ACS foster care has also been greatly reduced in recent years (Center for an Urban Future, 2011; New York City Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence, 2018).<sup>1</sup> Still, the need for services that support youth who are near or already have aged out is urgent.

Responding to this need, the Criminal Justice Investment Initiative (CJII) of the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office (DANY) awarded \$3.75M through a competitive solicitation to local, targeted, and innovative programs that support FYTA in 2018.<sup>2</sup> The two awardees, Graham Windham’s Graham SLAM (Support, Lead, Achieve, Model) and The Door’s Manhattan Academy Plus (MAP), offer youth aging out of care flexible, personalized support to empower youth through mentorship coaching and youth-driven service provision, respectively (see Appendices A-C for more information and logic models of the two programs). A second FYTA-driven service program of The Door, Bronx Academy (BA), was not funded through DANY’s

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<sup>1</sup> Among youth ages 16 and older who left foster care in 2004, 21 percent entered a Department of Homeless Services (DHS) homeless shelter within three years of exiting care (Center for an Urban Future, 2011). By comparison, 10 percent of youth ages 18 to 21 who left care between 2011 and 2013 entered a DHS homeless shelter or were incarcerated within three years of exiting care (New York City Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> CJII was established by DANY to invest approximately \$250M of criminal asset forfeiture funds in projects that will improve public safety, develop broad crime prevention efforts, and promote a fair, efficient justice system in NYC. The City University of New York (CUNY) Institute for State and Local Governance (ISLG) provides guidance and oversight to award recipients and conducts performance measurement across the initiative.

CJII initiative but is included in this evaluation to compare the experiences of participants in MAP versus BA and examine whether programmatic differences between MAP and BA lead to different outcomes among participants. The Door is nationally known for its youth-driven model of service provision and Graham pioneered the foster youth coaching model in New York City.

### The Mid-Evaluation Report

In 2018, CJII selected Action Research through a competitive solicitation to conduct an independent evaluation of the two FYTA programs and the Door's Bronx Academy (BA) in partnership with Child Trends and the Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI).<sup>3</sup> The FYTA Evaluation began in April 2019 and consists of a process evaluation, outcome evaluation, and cost avoidance analysis.<sup>4</sup> This mid-evaluation report provides a progress update on the first two years of the FYTA Evaluation and focuses on the process evaluation, including:

- (i) a literature review,
- (ii) a status update on evaluation activities, including a detailed description of the programs and logic models, the human subjects review, data access, and methodology modifications on research design due to the COVID-19 pandemic,
- (iii) developments in the policies, programs, and context that impact FYTA in NYC,
- (iv) findings and recommendations to date, based on staff interviews conducted before and during the pandemic, program data obtained from the two FYTA programs, and administrative data provided by the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS), and
- (v) a roadmap explaining our plan of action moving forward to complete the outcome evaluation.

Throughout the report, we describe how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted program implementation at Graham SLAM and The Door as well as the FYTA Evaluation's timeline and activities.

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<sup>3</sup> Child Trends is a national research organization focused exclusively on youth issues. See <https://www.childtrends.org>. CIDI is a policy and research group located with the Office of the Mayor of the City of New York. See <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/cidi/index.page>.

<sup>4</sup> More detailed information on evaluation design, including the research protocol, is available from the evaluation team.

## Literature Review

A key predictor of adolescents' well-being as they transition into young adulthood is receiving social support from teachers, family, and friends (Chu et al., 2010). Social support, defined as both psychological and material resources, has been shown to benefit adolescents' self-esteem, physical and mental health, coping skills, academic achievement, career expectancy (e.g., more career planning, or higher expectations about one's career outcomes), and conduct (e.g., less aggression or misbehavior; Chu et al., 2010). Among youth transitioning out of foster care in particular, there is evidence that receiving social support such as information or resources from adults positively affects youths' high school completion and college access (Day et al., 2012; Okpych & Courtney, 2014; Skobba et al., 2018). A growing body of literature also suggests that having a "natural" mentor, or a supportive nonparental adult from within a youth's social network, has positive benefits on psychosocial, behavioral, and academic outcomes among FYTA (Thompson et al., 2016). Yet within the foster care system, the opportunities for older youth to develop supportive relationships with positive role model adults are often limited, especially when youth experience placement instability (Perry, 2006). In many cases, older foster youth rely only on their peers for support (Melkman, 2017; Perez & Romo, 2011) while facing numerous and significant challenges.

On average, older youth involved in the foster care system have experienced multiple complex traumas (Greeson et al., 2011), have lower educational attainment (Clemens et al., 2017; Harris et al., 2009; Morton, 2015, 2018), higher unemployment rates (Harris et al., 2009; Hook & Courtney, 2011; Hook & Hall, 2010; Okpych & Courtney, 2014; Stewart et al., 2014), and are more likely to experience homelessness (Dworsky et al., 2013; Samuels et al., 2019), housing instability (Dworsky et al., 2012), and be diagnosed with a mental health disorder (Havlicek et al., 2013). Research suggests that systemic issues (e.g., policies, investments, or availability of services; Prince et al., 2019; Kushel et al., 2007), negative experiences in care (e.g., unstable placements; Pecora et al., 2006; Garcia et al., 2006), and trauma (Dworsky et al., 2013) may all contribute to the adverse outcomes older foster youth often face. For example, transition-age youth have been found to have a higher likelihood of experiencing homelessness if they have an unmet need for healthcare or are uninsured (Kushel et al., 2007), live in a state that invests relatively fewer dollars in housing supports (Prince et al., 2019), have experienced more placement instability (Dworsky et al., 2013), or have symptoms of a mental health disorder

(Dworsky et al., 2013). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the challenges FYTA face, including in areas of education, employment, and housing, as well as mental health and social connectedness (Greeson et al., 2020). Like all adolescents, older youth who are in or aged out of foster care need opportunities, resources, and social supports to cope with stress, attain stability, and achieve their educational and career goals. The pandemic has only made this more salient.

Mentoring/coaching programs, which assist youth in establishing socially supportive relationships with nonparental adults, have demonstrated potential to achieve positive outcomes and promote resilience in youth transitioning out of foster care. A variety of mentoring programs exist and they often differ in approach. One such program, Advocates to Successful Transition to Independence (ASTI), pairs older foster youth with advocates who aim to teach specific skills such as how to fill out job applications, budget money, or find a place to live. Results of an evaluation of the program found that all youth who participated reported an increase in independent living skills, suggesting that mentoring programs may help youth develop concrete knowledge and strategies relevant to transitioning to adulthood (Osterling & Hines, 2006). Coaching programs may also promote positive “intangible” outcomes. A recent experimental evaluation of the My Life Model (MLM) program found that FYTA who participated in weekly personalized coaching, as well as workshops with young adults of similar lived experiences, had higher levels of self-determination one year later (Blakeslee et al., 2020). Specifically, youth reported increases in their self-determination skills, such as being able to cope with stress or identify the steps necessary to achieve a goal, and their self-attribution of accomplishments (i.e., the number of personal accomplishments they identified in a year; Blakeslee et al., 2020). Both Graham SLAM and The Door, the subjects of this FYTA Evaluation, incorporate a coaching model for FYTA into their programming, albeit using different approaches. (See Appendices B and C for The Door and Graham SLAM’s logic models.)

Other interventions designed to support older youth transitioning out of foster care have focused on offering supports or assistance in areas such as housing, employment, or education, often to promote independent living and self-sufficiency. Many studies document the availability of and effectiveness of supports for older youth transitioning out of foster care (Greeson et al., 2015; Rashid, 2004; Vorhies et al., 2009). Efforts to impact the life trajectory of this population have had mixed results (Courtney et al., 2011; Vorhies et al., 2009). Similar to The Door

program, YVLifeSet<sup>5</sup> provides young people with individualized and clinically focused case management, support, and counseling on issues. In the second year of follow-up of the YVLifeSet, researchers found that short-term positive impacts on employment and earnings continued (Valentine et al., 2018).

## Description of The Door and Graham SLAM

This evaluation assesses three programs operated by two providers that provide coaching and individualized services to older youth ages 16 to 24 years old who need housing, career, and/or education services and have current or previous involvement in the foster care system in NYC: [1] The Door's Bronx Academy (BA), [2] The Door's Manhattan Academy Plus (MAP), and [3] Graham SLAM (Support, Lead, Achieve, and Model). Below, we provide an overall description of both The Door and Graham programs and address how the two programs are similar but also diverge in important ways.

### The Door

Both MAP and BA deliver services exclusively to older youth with foster care experiences, providing academic support (e.g., Adult Basic Education, test preparation), employment/career support (e.g., readiness and occupational skills training), and other supportive services (e.g., mental health service, financial literacy, and self-care). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the two sites recruited current and former youth in foster care through on-site recruitment and walk-ins, street outreach in areas where runaway and homeless youth are known to gather, and referrals from partner agencies. One notable difference between the two sites is that MAP has two housing specialists who work with youth individually to assess housing needs (e.g., shelter referrals, transitional living application, permanent supportive housing applications), whereas the BA does not. Program staff at BA, however, can refer their older youth to the housing services provided at MAP and other agencies. MAP provides most services on-site, while BA provides some services on-site, such as career and education, but uses a referral-based model to connect older youth with MAP's suite of services and other services provided at other organizations. Since the onset of the pandemic, both MAP and BA are

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<sup>5</sup> The study sample includes men and women ages 18 to 24 who were living in Tennessee and who had left foster care or juvenile justice custody as teenagers or were aging out at 18.

operating on a hybrid basis where most programming is provided to youth virtually, but youth may meet with their program staff on-site on a scheduling basis during the pandemic.

Youth may begin and end service engagement at any time., Some youth, for example, only need assistance from a housing specialist at MAP while others may need years of intensive academic and career readiness training coupled with housing support. Some program components, however, have more defined curricula and durations. This open-ended service structure provides the flexibility necessary to address youths' needs.

### Graham SLAM

Similarly, Graham SLAM focuses on older youths' educational and employment goals. Graham is a foster care agency with locations throughout NYC and the metro area. Graham provides long-term support to young people in foster care from high school into early adulthood through the Support, Lead, Achieve, and Model (SLAM) initiative, which assigns a coach to willing young people at their agency. Recruitment and outreach occur mostly within Graham's existing foster care programs in Harlem, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. Graham SLAM prioritizes outreach to youth who are active in Graham's foster care program, as well as youth who have left Graham's foster care program since Graham SLAM started in April 2014. Graham SLAM program supervisors set up initial meetings to explain the program and seek to engage youth between the ages of 16 and 24. Beginning in July 2019, Graham started to serve youth in high school who are younger than 16 years old.

Once a youth enrolls in Graham SLAM, the youth decides whether they want to receive "intensive coaching." Youth who are interested in intensive coaching are paired by a Graham SLAM supervisor with a coach based on compatibility, coach skills, and coach experience. Coaches have caseloads of 20 youth that they work with to develop individualized educational and career-focused goals and action plans.

Youth who are not interested in intensive coaching are connected to the Success Services Team (SST) that specializes in education and employment. Some youth may only want help in reviewing college or job applications. Each youth has the option to be assigned a coach later if they decide they want one and SST membership is often an entryway to the intensive coaching program. Staff encourage youth to attend a SLAM JAM Mixer to learn more about Graham SLAM and intensive coaching.

The coaches aid youth in preparing job applications, selecting vocational training programs, and preparing for job interviews while youth engage in internships and part-time or full-time employment. There are ongoing, individual support and planning sessions using Motivational Interviewing, an evidence-based counseling technique for motivating behavioral change (Levensky et al., 2007), to support youth's educational and career goals. In addition to individual coaching, Graham SLAM also provides youth with college readiness assistance (e.g., selecting schools, applications, scholarships, financial aid) through specialized workshops on topics such as the college admissions process.

While Graham SLAM staff had initially used a linear phase framework to indicate youth's progress in programming and reaching their goals, they have begun reimagining how youth are meeting criteria for each phase in the program without changing the phases officially. To elaborate, when Graham SLAM was originally developed, the program had four phases: Intensive, Supportive, Stability, and Launching. Each Graham SLAM phase has the population of targeted youth for each phase, and an associated frequency of contact (see Appendix C). All youth enrolled in Graham SLAM started with the Intensive phase, regardless of their age or circumstances at the time of program enrollment. Each phase would provide guidelines to coaches in terms of the minimum number of contacts they should have with their youth every month to assess their ongoing needs and to keep older youth engaged in the programming. For instance, older youth in the Intensive phase would be contacted by their coaches or staff at least four times a month through in-person, phone, text, or email. Similarly, older youth in the Supportive phase would be contacted at least three times a month, followed by the Stability phase for a minimum of one contact per month. Finally, in the Launching phase, college graduates or adult youth on what Graham SLAM has termed a "living wage career pathway" (working a stable job of at least a year) will continue to have at least one check-in with their coaches each month. Graham SLAM youth with an Outreach status are no longer actively enrolled and engaged in programming. Youth who have the Outreach or the Launching status will be contacted by the outreach coordinator periodically to determine whether they would like to be re-connected to their coaches or need any targeted services.

Later, program staff recognized that youth may meet the criteria to be in one phase in one aspect of their life but another phase in another aspect. This recognition from Graham SLAM staff led staff to reimagine the original phases in their program implementation. Staff later also

shared that the number of contacts per week or month may not be the best indicator of youth's progress in reaching their goals, as some youth may need more contacts with staff as they progress further depending on their needs. This is especially true for many youths during the COVID-19 pandemic, where program staff are moving away from using contact points as thresholds for phases, and there is always flexibility in programming that allow youth to move back and forth between phases depending on youth's needs and progress towards their goals.

In addition to developing supportive relationships between coaches and youth, Graham SLAM provides youth with opportunities to support each other through the following peer groups: [1] Bengals [2] Career Club [3] College Crew [4] Network Support Groups. The groups meet each week, checking in on each young person's challenges, sharing stresses and concerns as well as individual action planning. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the sessions are followed by dinner and often an activity as well, such as roller skating, ice skating, or painting. All peer support groups went to a virtual format with the onset of the pandemic.

## Process Evaluation Methods

### Research Questions

The process evaluation conducted in Years 1 and 2 aimed to answer several research questions:

1. How does program implementation compare to program plans?
2. What challenges have the programs identified?
3. What strategies were developed to address service delivery challenges? How well did those strategies work?
4. What are the strengths of the different program models?
5. What are the lessons for the field?

During Year 2 of the FYTA Evaluation, NYC became the initial epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. The pandemic further impacted the lives of older youth with foster care experience, as well as program implementations for both The Door and Graham SLAM and AR evaluation activities. While our research questions remain the same for both process and outcome evaluation as the original evaluation plan proposed before the pandemic, we also

examined how COVID-19 might affect the data on youth outcomes and program implementations.

### *Year 1 and 2 Evaluation Activities to Date*

In Years 1 and 2, following approval from a private IRB and the ACS Research Review Committee, we focused our analytic capacity on understanding programming and implementation challenges by conducting staff interviews and analyzing program data. Below we describe the data sources, data collection procedures, and analytical approach used to analyze the staff interviews, quarterly reports, and program data from both programs.

### *Updates on Human Subjects Review and Data Access*

The pandemic caused delays in conducting many evaluation activities, required changes in our methodology, and will impact the evaluation design. Still, the evaluation team overcame many challenges to conduct interviews, data analyses, and other activities. The core of the FYTA Evaluation is intact. Below we describe our activities over the past two years.

Before collecting qualitative or quantitative data, regulations required the evaluation team to obtain approvals from a private IRB, ACS, the CIDI IRB, and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). We obtained all approvals needed to field the youth survey and to conduct focus groups and interviews with staff and older youth over age 18 years. (See Appendix D for more details on the study review process.) We are in the process of submitting modifications to our protocols to allow for more effective outreach to young people. Our original plan relied heavily on in-person contact that was severely curtailed by the pandemic.

### *Program Data*

Both Graham SLAM and The Door collect data on their participants, which allows program staff to track youth progress and engagement in programming. For Graham SLAM, program data are entered by coaches and supervisors through SharePoint forms designed for the program. Data are saved directly into an SQL database. Graham SLAM staff would begin entering information about youth at intake, such as youths' demographics, arrest, housing, and immigration status. In addition, Graham SLAM staff enter data each time they make a contact with youth, parents, and foster care agencies. Educational statuses are entered twice a year and attendance information are entered after each group session. On the other hand, The Door staff track youth data and progress using their Salesforce system. At the beginning of Year 1, The

Door and its data team worked with ISLG and finalized the data to be collected for MAP quarterly data reporting, and they also created dashboards in their Salesforce system to allow managers and staff to monitor and track program process towards outcomes. The Door data team also spent time at the beginning of Year 1 to build out MAP Salesforce for its housing program, as well as created a system in Salesforce for both Career and Education and Housing staff to be able to conduct 12-month follow ups with engaged MAP participants.

The FYTA Initiative evaluation team worked with Graham SLAM and The Door to execute a data use agreement. Graham SLAM provided program data in March April 2021, and The Door provided program data in June 2021. We requested the following data from each organization:

1. Participants' demographic characteristics: age, biological sex, race, age at foster care exit, most recent foster care exit
2. Service utilization: program location, enrollment date, program exit date, types of services utilized during program enrollment, Success services
3. Program attendance: number of sessions attended for different support groups offered
4. Educational status and history: education status at program enrollment, one year later, two years later
5. Employment status and history: number of quarters youth was employed by various job types
6. Length of stay in program, contact method, and frequency

Additionally, we received child welfare administrative data from ACS in November 2020. The data include demographic characteristics of NYC foster youth, specifically:

1. Age, biological sex, and race
2. Age at foster care entry, entry alone or with siblings
3. Foster care status (still in care versus non-permanency discharge)
4. Number and type of substantiated allegations of maltreatment

### *Staff Interviews*

Participants. In Year 1, we interviewed a total of 14 staff, including directors, service specialists, and coaches, across the three sites: six program staff at Graham SLAM and eight program staff at The Door. In Year 2, we interviewed 16 program staff across the three sites:

seven program staff at Graham SLAM and nine program staff at The Door. We were able to re-interview 13 of the same program staff from Year 1.

Data Source and Procedures. Action Research conducted interviews with staff at all three sites. Hard copies of consent forms were provided to program staff at the beginning of the interview and upon the program staff's consent, and Action Research audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews in addition to taking notes to ensure accuracy. Each interview lasted around one hour. The 14 Year 1 interviews were conducted onsite and in-person between November and December 2019. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted the 16 Year 2 staff interviews virtually during December 2020.

Instruments. We developed protocols for program staff interviews to answer the process study research questions. Interview questions differ by program staff's role and responsibilities. Generally, the program staff interview protocol covers the following (see Appendices E and F for the detailed instrument):

1. *Staff Background Information* (e.g., the role of the staff in the program)
2. *Program Implementation* (e.g., staff capacity, recruitment, retention)
3. *Program Model* (e.g., process for working with older youth in the program)
4. *Model Adaptations* (e.g., changes to the original program design)
5. *Training and Support* (e.g., staff training and preparation)
6. *Program Strengths* (e.g., factors contributing to program success, best practices)
7. *Challenges and Recommendations* (e.g., implementation challenges, resources needed, recommendations for improvement)

For Year 2 interviews, we utilized the same protocols developed in Year 1 with the three new staff to gain a full understanding of their backgrounds, roles, day-to-day work experiences, and any challenges they faced in the program. With the program staff who were already interviewed in Year 1, we focused on updates and changes to their work and their agency's programming that had occurred since our first interview, most of which related to changes in program implementation, youth engagement, staff support, and relationship building due to the pandemic. Our follow-up questions asked staff about the impact the pandemic had on youths' well-being and various outcomes staff observed from working with youth in their programs.

### *Quarterly Reports*

In addition to the staff interviews, we reviewed and coded 16 quarterly reports submitted by both agencies to ISLG/DANY during their first and second years of program implementation. The reports describe the programs' implementation and progress toward their contractual goals with CJII and help ISLG better support the programs, in part by identifying training and technical assistance needs. Topics covered in these reports include program performance, collection and use of data, updates on long-term planning for programming sustainability, and more. In addition, Year 2 Quarter 4 reports from both agencies provided further insights on the impact of COVID-19 on programming and sustainability challenges.

For more information on the analytical approach of developing a codebook and coding the Year 1 and Year 2 staff interviews and quarterly reports, see Appendix G.

## Developments that Impact New York City Foster Youth Transitioning to Adulthood

In the two years since the start of this evaluation, much of the context in which foster youth in New York City transition to adulthood has changed. In the section below, we describe two major developments, the start of the Fair Futures initiative and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In June 2019, a broad coalition of advocacy groups, service providers, foundations, and other stakeholders advocated successfully to establish the Fair Futures initiative with \$10 million in funding allocated by the New York City Council in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020.<sup>6</sup> Funding for Fair Futures has since grown to \$12 million in FY 2021 and \$20 million in FY 2022, with \$12 million now baselined annually. Fair Futures is a coaching model available to all New York City youth in foster care, with ambitions to serve youth from 9<sup>th</sup> grade to age 26 years with any foster care history.<sup>5</sup> The model's services and service delivery are based on best practice programs in NYC and evidence-based national models that serve young people in foster care (parts of the model were adapted from Graham SLAM, whose staff helped design the model).<sup>7</sup> Prior to Fair Futures,

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<sup>6</sup> For more information, see <https://www.fairfuturesny.org>.

<sup>7</sup> Action Research supports the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Foster Youth Initiative, which seeks to improve the systems that support foster youth transitioning to adulthood in New York City and Los Angeles. Knowledge from that work, including our knowledge of the development of Fair Futures, informs this sections and other parts of this report.

the resources available to FYTA in NYC depended largely on the resources and commitment of individual foster care providers and their staff, with limited funds from ACS available to youth with an APPLA goal as part of the Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA) program.<sup>8</sup> Now, for the first time, all service providers to NYC FYTA have access to a robust, manualized<sup>9</sup> program model that includes extensive and sophisticated training for coaches, supervisors, and program directors; technical assistance from experts; and a cross-agency database/Management Information System (MIS) that tracks progress youth make toward their goals. Part of the Fair Futures initiative includes coaches training on a new [online resource of youth services](#) developed by One Degree. We know of no other jurisdiction that offers such a comprehensive model to all FYTA.

After hiring and training hundreds of staff, Fair Futures launched in the spring of 2020, just as the COVID-19 pandemic shut down New York City. The pandemic had a profoundly negative impact on FYTA, particularly concerning education, employment, and career development (Greeson et al., 2020). At the onset of the pandemic, few FYTA had the technology and other resources needed to participate fully in remote education. Though the New York City Department of Education, ACS, foster care providers, Fair Futures, foundations, and many others made efforts to ensure that foster youth had access to remote education, these efforts took time and had mixed success. On the post-secondary level, CUNY and SUNY campuses closed dormitories and laid off student workers, which created housing issues for students in foster care. Among youth with the technology available to attend online classes, whether in or out of foster care, fulfilling basic needs such as shelter, food, avoiding infection, and accessing healthcare exhausted time and energy previously devoted to school.

The pandemic devastated the city's economy and workforce and had a disproportionate impact on young people. Before the pandemic, New York City's unemployment rate, at less than four percent, was at its lowest point in over 40 years.<sup>10</sup> Within a week, unemployment increased to over 20 percent, with the service sector and other jobs often held by FYTA disappearing.<sup>11</sup> Many established workforce development organizations that served youth closed within a few

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<sup>8</sup> For information on PYA, see <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/policies/init/2011/F.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> By manualized, we mean that the program model has a detailed written manual that describes staffing, training, service phases, service types, interaction modalities, and more so that the program can be replicated with fidelity.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/NYUR>.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.centrernyc.org/reports-briefs/2020/10/1/cnycas-covid-19-economic-update>.

weeks of the March 2020 shutdown. New York City’s Summer Youth Employment Program, on which many foster youths rely, was canceled, and then restored in remote form and with half the number of slots.<sup>12</sup> Social connections, especially connections with peers on which so many FYTA rely, diminished. A national study found that the pandemic made FYTA more vulnerable by limiting schooling, job opportunities, services, and the ability to connect with others socially, with damaging effects on youths’ living situation, financial situation, food security, employment, educational progress or attainment, symptoms of depression or anxiety, and perceived ability to rely on others (Greeson et al. 2020). ACS implemented new programming to reduce the loss of economic and workforce development opportunities among youth, including a paid virtual internship for 100 college students in foster care and coordinating a virtual career fair, through which 70 youth gained employment or were enrolled in ACS internship programs (New York City Administration for Children’s Services [ACS], 2021).

As local and state governments developed resources to address the immediate needs of foster youth, the federal government expanded assistance to FYTA during the pandemic. Federal funding for foster youth transition services is available under the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood, which was established in 1999 and serves youth ages 14 to 23 (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019). Typically, the federal government provides around \$140M a year in Chafee funding for career exploration services, mentoring, preventive health activities, basic food and shelter needs, and educational assistance, including vouchers for colleges or vocational programs (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress authorized an additional \$400M in Chafee funding in 2021, increasing funds for independent living by \$350M and educational assistance by \$50M through 2022 (Kelly, 2021). Pandemic response legislation also eased the program’s eligibility restrictions on allowable expenses, verification procedures, and youths’ age through September 2021, as well as increased the size of Education and Training Vouchers from \$5,000 to \$12,000 through September 2022 (Kelly, 2021). The federal law placed a moratorium on automatic discharges from foster care to non-permanency exits at age 21, allows re-entry into foster care up to age 22, and expands funding eligibility through age 26 through September 2021.

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<sup>12</sup> See <https://citylimits.org/2020/08/04/summer-youth-programs-still-reeling-from-funding-cut-and-late-reversal>.

## Findings to Date

Below, we present findings based on data and information collected from the Years 1 and 2 evaluation activities described above, seeking to answer the five aforementioned research questions. First, we present demographic characteristics of NYC foster youth based on the child welfare administrative data provided by ACS and compare them to program data received from Graham SLAM and The Door to better understand the population served. We also present an overview of maltreatment substantiations older youth experienced using the information provided by ACS<sup>13</sup>, as well as staff's discussion of program challenges attached to poor mental health support for youth. Second, we present engagement barriers and strategies coaches used when connecting with and engaging youth in programming, based on the staff interviews and program data. Third, we present how coaches and program staff were flexible and prompt in responding to youths' needs during COVID-19, a strategy that is necessary for youth success and goal attainment. Finally, we present indicators of successful program implementation from both programs, most importantly staffs' demonstrated commitment to serving FYTA despite the many challenges faced.

**Finding 1: FYTA, including Graham SLAM and The Door youth, are exposed to many adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and face mental health and socioeconomic challenges that impact their education, employment, and housing outcomes.**

To learn more about the population eligible to receive services from The Door and Graham SLAM, we first analyzed child welfare administrative data provided by ACS. Both programs' populations draw from this pool. These data included demographic characteristics, experiences with child protection, and foster care experience in NYC. In November 2020, we received data for all children in NYC foster care at any point who had birthdates between 1993 and 2007. This group of older youth is between the ages 14 to 24 years old and were eligible to enroll in The Door or Graham SLAM. Both agencies provided information on youth enrolled in their programs: 403 youth in foster care enrolled in Graham SLAM between 2014-2020 (Graham SLAM participants) and 478 youth with foster care experience enrolled in The Door between

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<sup>13</sup> A substantiation indicates that an ACS child protective specialist found "credible evidence" that supported an allegation of maltreatment.

2018-2021 (The Door participants). Of The Door participants, 178 (37%) were enrolled in Bronx Academy, 152 (32%) were enrolled in the MAP Housing Program, and 148 (31%) in MAP's CareerEd Program.

Our preliminary analysis indicates that most youth who enroll in The Door and Graham SLAM programs are those who are 18 years old or older and still in care or who had non-permanency exits from foster care (meaning they were not reunified, adopted, or discharged to a subsidized guardianship). Below, we provide demographic characteristics of the larger cohort of youth in the ACS foster care data. We then compare this larger cohort to the Graham SLAM participants and The Door participants.

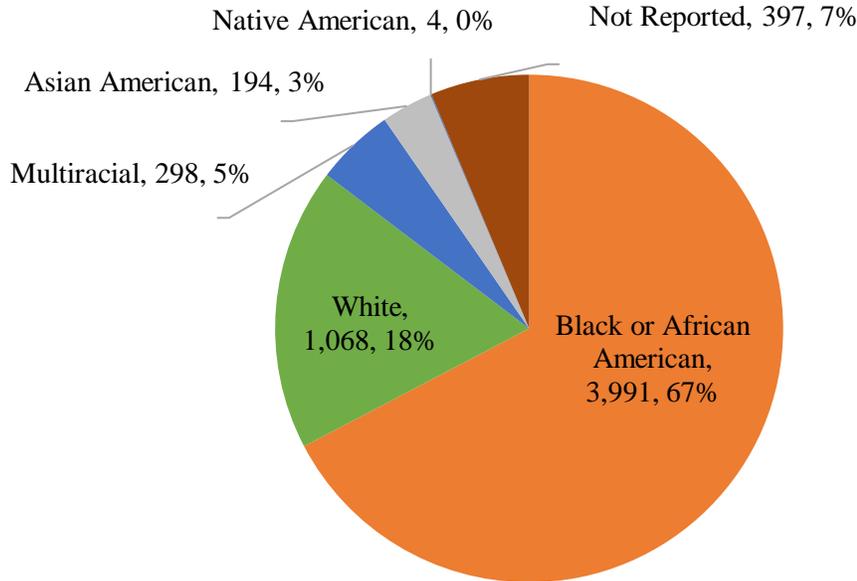
Of all 78,269 youth in foster care at any point of time with birthdates between 1993 and 2007, AR identified a total of 5,952 youth, herein identified as "ACS foster youth" who were still in foster care as of the ACS data extraction date (November 2020) or who experienced a non-permanency exit for their first foster care entry. As of November 2020, all of these ACS foster youth fit The Door and Graham SLAM program eligibility criteria, allowing for comparisons between program participants and their larger ACS cohort.

- Of the 5,952 ACS foster youth, 2,680 (45%) were still in care, while 3,272 (55%) had experienced non-permanency discharges.
- Just over half (54%) of the youth entered the NYC foster care system between FY 2014 to FY 2021.
- Of the 5,952 ACS foster youth, 4,214 (71%) youth entered foster care during their adolescence (age 13 to 17), while the remaining 1,748 (29%) entered foster care at age 12 years or younger.
- About a third (34%) entered foster care with a sibling.
- Of the ACS foster youth, 54 percent were female.
- Finally, Black youth were disproportionately represented among ACS foster youth: 67% of the 5,952 ACS foster youth were identified as Black or African American (See Figure 1)<sup>14</sup>, compared to 22% of New York City children under the age of 18 (US Bureau of the Census data as reported by Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, 2019). Of the 5,952 ACS foster youth, 2,213 (37%) were identified as Latinx of any race.

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<sup>14</sup> Due to the limits of Connection data on race and ethnicity, Latinx youth are listed as a separate population regardless of race.

Figure 1: Youth in Care with DOB between 1993 to 2007 who experienced a non-permanency exit, by Race, N= 5,952 Children who are still in care or adulthood attained  
 Source: CCRS and CNNX as of November 2020



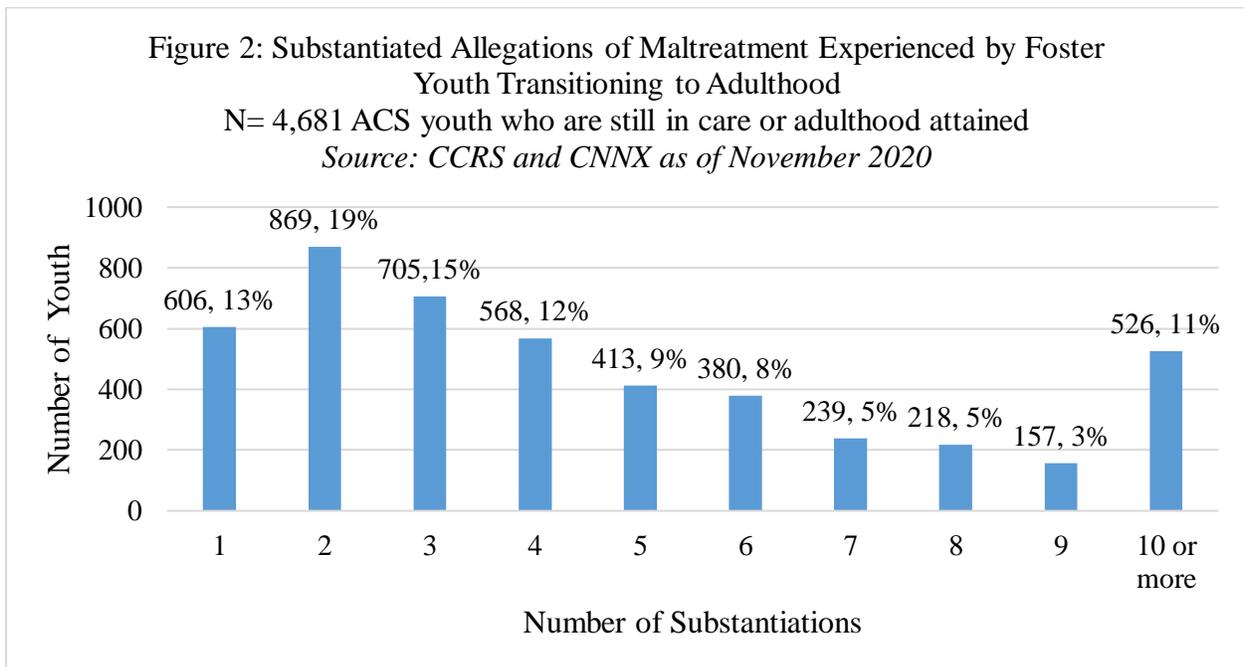
Note: Children in these categories may or may not also be identified as Latinx

Sub-finding 1: FYTA are exposed to various ACEs, and Graham SLAM and The Door youth reflect this broader population.

Previous literature on older youth transitioning out of foster care, based primarily on surveys, indicates that many have experienced various forms of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in their early life and foster care (Rebbe et al., 2017). Our analysis is consistent with this research: NYC FYTA often have extensive histories of maltreatment that strongly suggest they have experienced many ACEs.<sup>15</sup> Readers should be aware that we are not asserting this maltreatment to be representative of the experiences of other youth who become involved in the child protection or foster care systems.

<sup>15</sup> A substantiation indicates that an ACS child protective specialist found “credible evidence” that supported an allegation of maltreatment. The credible evidence standard used by New York State prior to 2021 is lower than in most other states and substantiation rates on investigations are higher than the national average. For more information on how New York State’s substantiation rate compares to other states, see the annual *Child Maltreatment* reports produced by the federal Children’s Bureau. Also, see Kahn et al. (2017).

Similar to the literature, we are using the proxy of child maltreatment substantiations to analyze ACEs among youth in the NYC foster care system.<sup>16</sup> ACS provided information on substantiated allegations where youth were determined by child protective specialists to be victims. These data include information on 4,681 youth, referred to hereafter as “youth with substantiated maltreatment,” who are still in care or who had a non-permanency exit.<sup>17</sup> Of the youth with substantiated maltreatment information, 3,206 (68%) experienced three or more instances of maltreatment, 1,933 (41%) experienced five or more instances, and nearly one in five (19%) experienced eight or more instances (see Figure 2). Prior research shows that cumulative stress experienced during childhood development often leads to homelessness, depression, and participation in criminal activities within this population of youth (Rebbe et al., 2017).



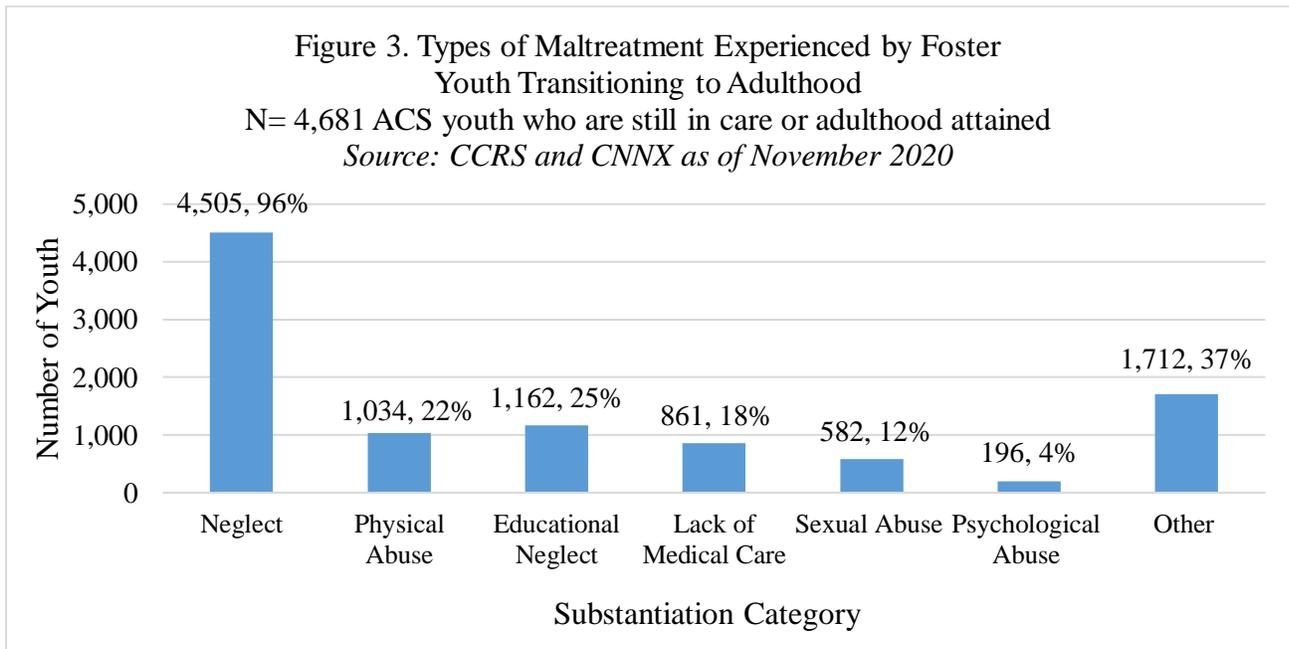
Older youth transitioning to adulthood often experience many types of maltreatment according to the ACS data. The Statewide Central Register (SCR) for Child Maltreatment has 25 types of allegations which can be grouped into seven categories for analytic purposes (see Figure

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Of all 5,952 youth, 4,681 youth had information about substantiation. The 1,271 youth without information were involved with ACS prior to the CNNX system storing historical information on substantiations.

3). Most categories of maltreatment would qualify as an adverse childhood experience, such as neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and psychological abuse (Downey et al., 2017). Of the 4,681 youth with substantiated maltreatment information, 4,505 (96%) had at least one substantiated neglect allegation.

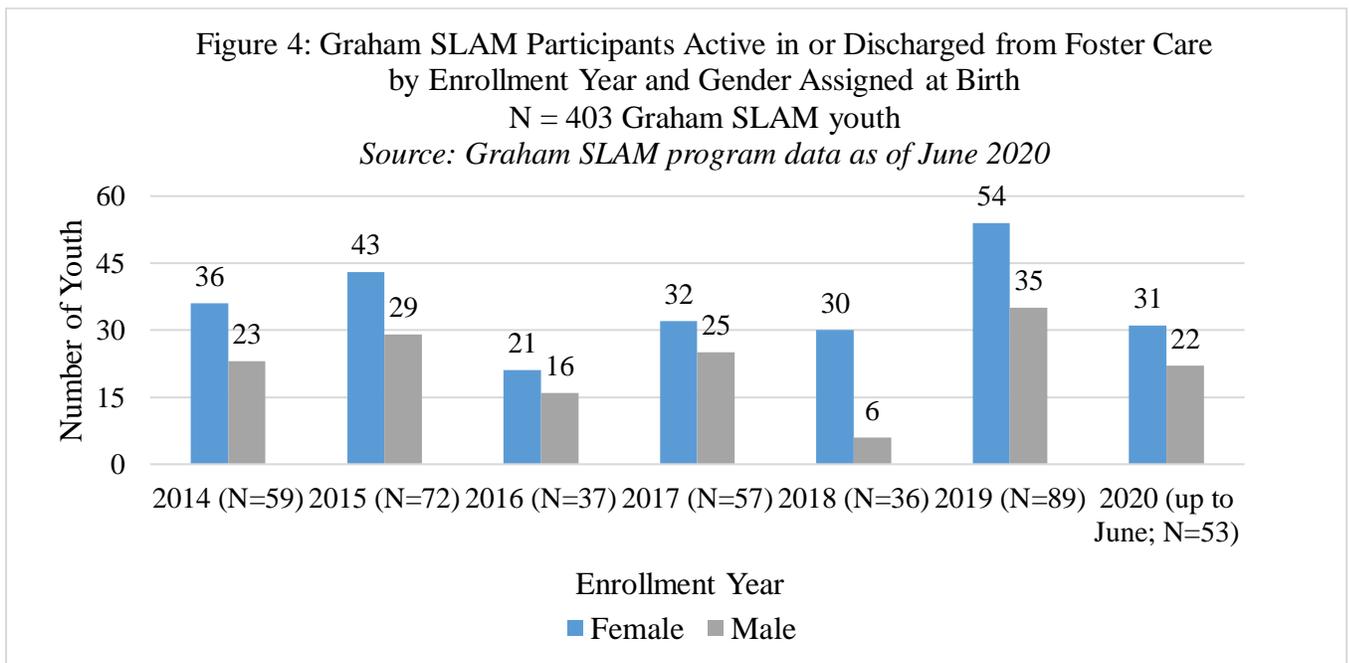
Beyond the common experience of neglect, the composition of substantiated maltreatment varies among older youth. One in five (22%) experienced physical abuse and one in four (25%) experienced educational neglect (see Figure 3). Of the 4,681 youth, 861 (18%) experienced a lack of medical care—a surprisingly high rate considering that medical neglect makes up only six percent of all maltreatment allegations among youth of all ages in the state of New York (“Child Maltreatment,” 2019). The different types of maltreatment youth experienced are consistent with other research that find that FYTA are a heterogeneous group. These results show the importance of understanding the accumulation of early adversities and their impact on the transition to adulthood when designing services for these young people.



*Note: Because youth may appear in more than one category, percentages do not add up to 100. Each youth can experience more than one allegation type within each substantiation category. The “Other” category includes the following substantiations: abandonment, child’s drug/alcohol use, parent’s drug/alcohol misuse, inappropriate custodial conduct, and other.*

## Graham SLAM Participants

The demographic characteristics of the Graham SLAM participants were similar to the ACS foster youth. More females than males enrolled in Graham SLAM (see Figure 4)<sup>18</sup> and most participants identified as Black. Participants entered Graham SLAM at a younger age since the onset of DANY funding. Youth who first enrolled during 2014-2017 (N=225) had a mean age of 18.1 years, while youth who first enrolled during 2018-2020 (N=178) had a mean age of 16.8 years. This decrease in average age reflects both programs' recent shift to lowering the participants' eligibility age from 16 to 14 in 2019 to accommodate youth in early high school. Of all Graham SLAM youth, 312 (77%) enrolled in the program when they were between 16 to 19 years old, followed by 55 (14%) who enrolled at over 20 years old and 36 (8%) who enrolled at under 16 years old. Of the 178 youth who were enrolled during 2018-2020, we found that 60 percent of the youth identified as Black or African American, followed by about a quarter (23%) who identified as Hispanic/Latino.<sup>19</sup>

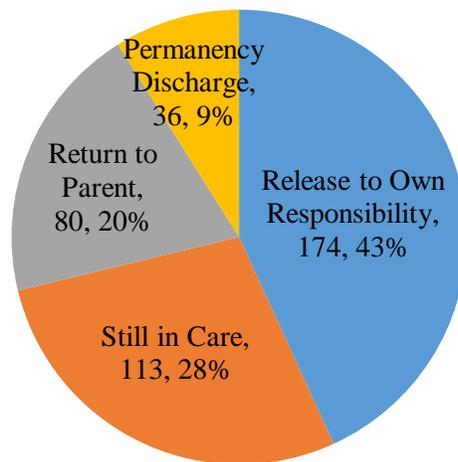


<sup>18</sup> The reported data only included two gender categories, presenting a limitation to a comprehensive understanding of Graham SLAM's participant demographics.

<sup>19</sup> Due to the limits of CNNX data on race and ethnicity, Latinx youth are listed as a separate population regardless of race.

Of the Graham SLAM participants, 290 (72%) had been discharged from foster care and 113 (28%) youth were still in care as of June 2020.<sup>20</sup> Among the Graham SLAM participants who were discharged, 76% exited foster care at age 18 or over. Most discharged youth (60%) had a discharge reason of “Release to Own Responsibility,” indicating a non-permanency discharge<sup>21</sup> (See Figure 5).

Figure 5: Graham SLAM Participants Active in or Discharged from Foster Care by Discharge Reasons  
 N= 403 Graham SLAM youth  
 Source: Graham SLAM program data as of June 2020



As this report was being written, Graham SLAM changed the program design from the four program phases outlined earlier, as the phases reflect the amount of program contact rather than the needs or progress made by youth. The data available for analysis, however, are still in phases. Based on the Graham SLAM program data we received, 93 (23%) of youth enrolled in Graham SLAM were in the Intensive phase, followed by 91 (23%) in the Supportive phase, and 48 (12%) in the Stability phase, with 157 (39%) having an Outreach status at the time of data extraction in March 2021. The remaining 14 (3%) Graham SLAM youth had an Inactive status, meaning outreach is no longer desired due to changes in circumstances (e.g., going to the military, moved out of state). Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic has further changed program

<sup>20</sup> Six of them were on trial discharge to reunification or release to relative, and the remaining were trial discharge to independent living.

<sup>21</sup> Common non-permanency exits include “adulthood attained,” “joined military,” and “discharged to corrections.”

phase philosophy. Graham SLAM is not following the original phases because the remote setting necessitates more contact with youth to ensure continued engagement and offer the needed support.

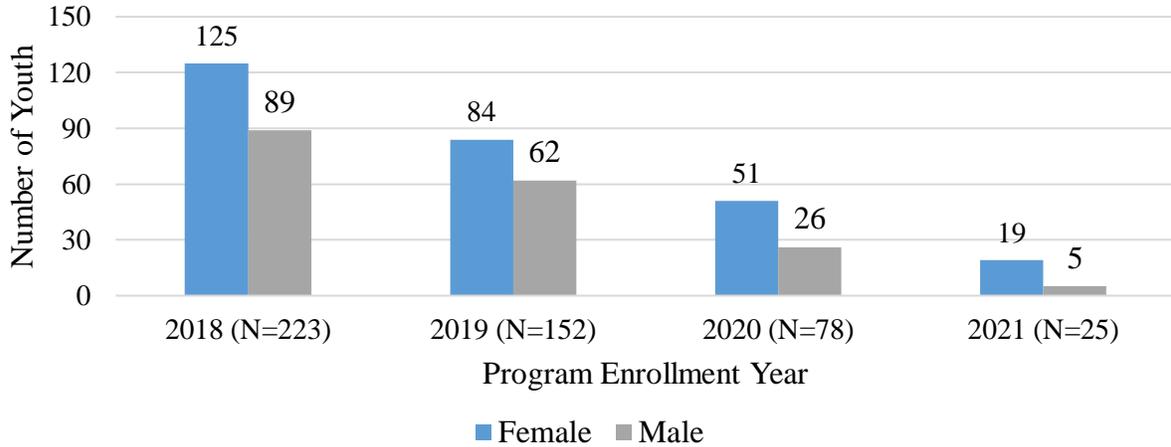
### The Door Participants

Similar to Graham SLAM, there were more females than males enrolled in The Door (See Figure 6). Of 478 The Door participants, 375 (79%) were enrolled during 2018-2019. Enrollment decreased following the onset of the pandemic as 78 youth (16%) enrolled in The Door programming in 2020. Youth who first enrolled during 2018-2021 had a mean age of 20.1 years, and 256 (54%) were 20 years or older when they enrolled in The Door program. Overall, The Door participants were older than Graham SLAM participants at program enrollment. Of The Door participants, 179 (37%) were first enrolled into Bronx Academy, 145 (30%) enrolled in MAP CareerEd Program and 154 (32%) enrolled in the MAP Housing Program (see Figure 7). The Door does not routinely track youths' foster care status like Graham SLAM does because The Door is not a foster care provider. Instead, The Door program data records foster care status information if youth disclose their foster care status at program enrollment. Of The Door participants, 336 (70%) youth had already exited foster care at their first program enrollment, and 142 (30%) were still in foster care at the time of program enrollment. Similar to Graham participants, 51 percent of The Door participants identified as Black or African American, followed by about 30 percent who identified as Hispanic/Latino (see Figure 8).

Figure 6. The Door youth with Foster Care Experiences, by First Program Enrollment Year and Gender

N= 478 The Door youth with foster care experience\*

Source: The Door program data as of June 2021



\*Note. Seven youth identified themselves as transgender female, three as gender-neutral, and one as transgender male. Six youth did not report their gender.

Figure 7. The Door Youth with Foster Care Experiences enrolled between 2018-2021, by Youth's First Program Enrollment

N= 478 The Door youth with foster care experience

Source: The Door program data as of June 2021

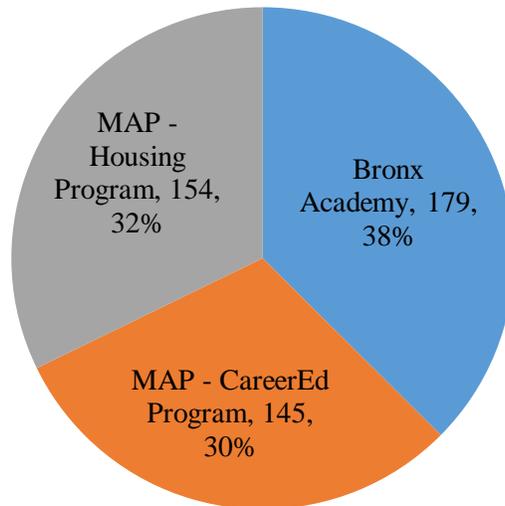
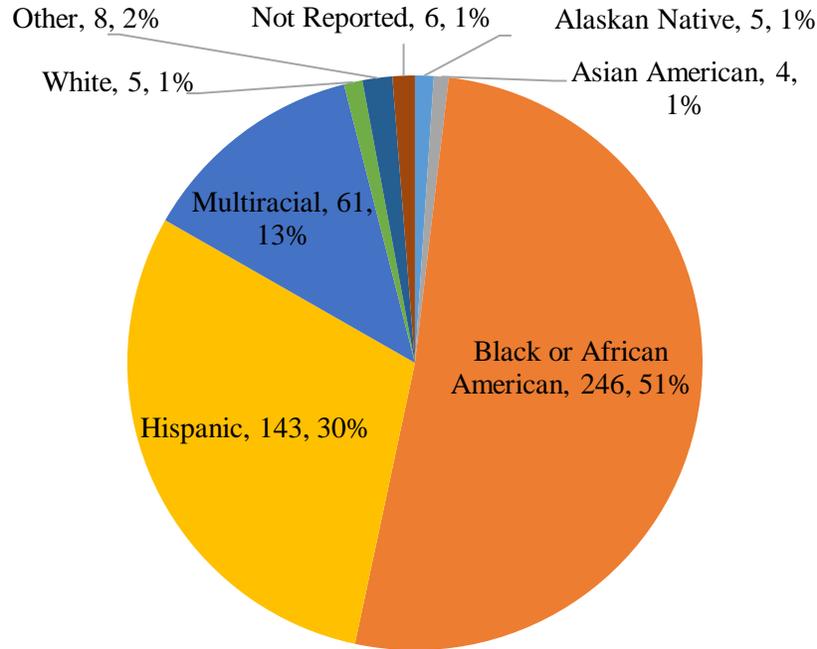


Figure 8. The Door Youth with Foster Care Experiences Enrolled between 2018-2021, by Youth's Race  
 N= 478 The Door youth with foster care experience  
 Source: *The Door program data as of June 2021*



Sub-finding 2: ACEs and behavioral health affect participants' ability to benefit from program support and their attainment of successful outcomes.

#### Participant History of ACEs

When coaches and specialists at The Door and Graham SLAM were asked to describe the challenges faced by the youth they serve, traumatic experiences, their impact on behavioral health, and a shortage of mental health treatment were noted frequently. Staff from both programs spoke about the prevalence of ACEs among FYTA and recognized the mental health problems that often stemmed from early adversities and current stressors in foster care. Staff reported that youth who have endured chronic instability and a lack of a consistent nurturing environment commonly struggle with mental health issues. As one staff member noted:

Having a home is so hard for them to reach, so inconsistent... They feel like they're singled out, and that can put them in a corner and keep them from opening up to their true potential."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Readers should note that extraneous words and confusing syntax in quotes have been edited for clarity.

In some cases, youth had traumatic experiences. As one coach said:

It [foster care experiences] can really be bad... reasons why they went AWOL [were] because they were being mistreated and refusing to go back.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has added even more isolation and instability to participants’ lives, further exacerbating mental health issues. Some youths’ mental illnesses have resulted in hospitalizations. One of The Door staff members commented:

Pretty much across the board, everyone is extremely anxious and experiencing depressive episodes. I've seen a few mental health breaks where clients were experiencing psychotic symptoms. I've had a few clients go into the hospital.

### Obstacles to Housing, Career, and Educational Outcomes

Mental health challenges also create a major obstacle to participants’ successful transition into adulthood through their impact on career and educational development. “A lot of the young people in foster care who have mental health issues, they have it a whole lot harder. In terms of being underprepared for adulthood, they are probably the most underprepared,” a coach at the Bronx Academy expressed. While supportive, The Door and Graham SLAM’s staff are not mental health clinicians and can find it challenging to serve youth struggling with mental illness. A shortage of foundational mental health support and services can also undermine the work of coaches and specialists. A staff member, for example, described helping a participant receive a City FHEPS (Family Homelessness & Eviction Prevention Supplement) voucher to get their own apartment. Lacking needed mental health supports, the participant “pretty much sabotaged everything” and is now in an adult shelter. The specialist spoke about the divide that poor mental health creates between participants who are able to take advantage of the resources available and those who do not: “You gotta think about it from both angles. This young person – ‘Yes. I have everything together but am I mentally able or capable of holding or taking care of my own property – my own apartment? ...This is what I want so bad. But am I mentally able to do this?’” The respondent ultimately closed the youth’s case, saying that they had run out of options. Such an account demonstrates the detrimental impact unaddressed mental health needs can have on program engagement and the successful attainment of coach-assisted goals.

The complexity of another program participant’s mental health issues significantly impacted their education and damaged both their academic performance and self-esteem:

Another kid who [had a psychotic disorder] and had to go to the hospital because they had an episode. They stopped taking their medication, and then I'm advocating for them. And [the school administrators] are like, "Well, if they reached the limit of the excused absences –," I can just advocate [to] the professors, but it's really up to them. This person is in the hospital. They literally are dealing with mental health stuff, and school is the only thing that makes them feel good about themselves. And you can't be more flexible? Come on.

When coaches at both programs focus on checking in regularly with youth to assess their mental state and remind them of the professional support at their disposal, participants stay more engaged and seek services. The pandemic offered an opportunity for both service providers to see youths' resiliency when using this approach. A coach explained:

Our engagement has increased a lot because we were able to get their feedback on what has been most challenging for them in the pandemic. Mental health was one. So, we have a workshop...30-minute sessions of us just talking about, 'How was your week? Was your week bad? Why was it bad?' ...Now I think it's better. They're handling it better.

**Sub-finding 3: Staff members do not feel equipped to handle participants' mental health challenges without the support of additional trainings and staffed mental health professionals.**

The situations coaches and specialists shared demonstrate that youths' unmanaged mental health issues can undermine program aims, and that mental health support services need to be a key element in FYTA programming. Some staff recommended more of a program focus on improving mental health support and services for youth suffering from trauma and mental instability. A coach at Graham SLAM emphasized that coaches do not have the expertise to confidently manage mental illnesses, saying, "We can definitely listen to our kids and support them. But we're not equipped with the things that they're dealing with that require their mental health stability." In Year 1 interviews, staff at The Door voiced desires for more extensive training, some of which could help coaches feel more equipped to support youth struggling with mental health problems. While staff explained that they do have trainings on crisis management and suicidality, some said The Door should have more trainings on "navigating mental illnesses, [and] self-care." When asked to provide an update, multiple interviewees in Year 2 said that there had been no additional trainings added since Year 1.

Staff in Year 2 also expressed that youth need access to more mental health professionals, and more specifically, therapists who have connections to their communities. Numerous staff members echoed this sentiment, frequently commenting that more therapists should "look like" the youth and perhaps have similar life experiences. One coach said that "Graham SLAM should

have access to more therapists, particularly people of color so that youth could have an easier time relating to/trusting them.” Another staff member explained that Graham’s need for more culturally competent counselors has increased during the pandemic:

This is an ongoing thing, but it’s definitely been exacerbated by the pandemic. Our kids need clinicians that are representative and that look like them, and that can really attune to their experiences. And I know that’s something that our clinic is actively working on, but I think, honestly, that’s a problem across the board in therapy.

Staff felt that having therapists with stronger community connections available to participants will help foster an environment of trust between participants and therapists that is essential for youth to feel comfortable and safe to speak openly about their problems. A coach explained, “Therapy’s about trust, not necessarily what you can help me with. Like, ‘I trust you enough to feel that I can talk to you about these things...’” Many youths with experience in foster care do not want to put their trust in unfamiliar adults and are wary of therapists. Knowing their programs have ready access to therapists who can relate to their experiences and background may encourage more youth to engage in therapy and make other services more effective. A coach at The Door added that coaches themselves need training on how to effectively work with and understand participants and families from various cultural backgrounds, adding that “there’re different cultures we work with here.”

Staff members also recommended that the telehealth therapy implemented during the pandemic should continue to be available to participants, as it presented a more viable option and increased participation. A coach at Graham SLAM explained, “Therapy being virtual has made it so much more sensible to so many of our kids, and if that could stay, that would be great... The fact that they could just do it from home has made it a lot easier to encourage them to participate.” Establishing remote therapy as an official part of the program models would help youth access the mental health support that they need to reach successful outcomes during their transition into adulthood.

**Sub-finding 4: Youth are at risk for involvement in the criminal justice system due to a lack of income or opportunity, and therefore also need the programs’ core services to help lead independent and fulfilling lives.**

The Door and Graham SLAM staff discussed the challenges related to FYTA’s frequent run-ins with the criminal justice system. As one specialist at The Door explained, there are a “huge percentage of our young people [who] have crossed with the criminal or juvenile justice

system... [even if that's] just getting a ticket. I couldn't give a percentage, but it's high and there's lots of reasons for that." Staff noted that involvement with the justice system often stems from a lack of basic needs, such as funds for transportation, or from facing other stressful situations. A specialist highlighted how youth are frequently cited by the police for noncriminal offenses and given harsh penalties that could easily be avoided with access to basic resources: "We've had young people who haven't had a Metro card and been arrested and been kept there from Friday until Monday. For what purpose? Because they didn't have \$2.75?" The Door and Graham SLAM work to provide services and resources such as Metro cards to help youth avoid potentially damaging interactions with the criminal justice system.

Staff members from both agencies explained that when there is justice system activity it can greatly impact youths' futures. A coach from Graham SLAM described how an arrest ended a participant's education: "He was doing really poorly in school. He was arrested in school, which was really bad... So, he really didn't go back to school after that." The FYTA population in NYC are in need of the housing, educational, and employment services foundational to both programs so that they can avoid involvement with the criminal justice system and receive the necessary help to lead successful and fulfilling lives.

## Finding 2: Program staff faced unexpected engagement barriers when working and connecting with youths in older youth programs.

### Engagement Approaches are Based on Programs' Individual Philosophies

Youth in foster care come from different backgrounds and experience a variety of challenges within the foster care system. FYTA youth are not all the same—they are unique to the past and current circumstances faced in their life. Recognizing this, both programs approach coaching and engagement differently. Graham SLAM's coaching strategies are more structured than the engagement strategies used at The Door. The coaches from Graham SLAM check in with the youth who are a part of their caseloads multiple times a week to see if they need assistance. The Door utilizes a more hands-off approach, where youth can use their services when they themselves deem fit. These two divergent strategies are valuable in their own ways, depending on the youth's preferred way of the coaching engagement. Below we provide data on program phases, service duration, frequency of contact, and youths' engagement in peer groups

to illustrate the program models. We integrate staffs’ perspectives on connecting and engaging older youth in their Year 1 and 2 interviews.

*Graham SLAM*

We observed variability in how long youth were enrolled in Graham SLAM, as well as how Graham SLAM youth engaged in programming. Specifically, of the 225 Graham SLAM youth enrolled between 2014 to 2017, 46 (20%) stayed in the program less than a year, while 122 (54%) remained in the program for more than three years (see Figure 9). In addition, Graham SLAM also tracks the number of contacts made with youth since the beginning of program enrollment by each contact method: face-to-face/in-person meeting, phone, email, video (e.g., Zoom), and texts. Graham SLAM program data also track any contacts made with a youth’s foster parents, biological parents, and foster care agencies. As shown in Table 1, coaches at Graham SLAM contacted youth most while they were enrolled in the program. Regardless of a youth’s length of program enrollment and specific program phase, they were contacted by their coaches about three times a month or more on average, excluding any unsuccessful attempts. This average monthly contact is consistent with the guidance provided to coaches described above for each phase (see Table 1 and Figure 10). As might be expected, among all contact methods, there were more successful contacts made by coaches to youth via text messages than other forms of communication, followed by in-person meetings and phone calls for both program entry cohorts.

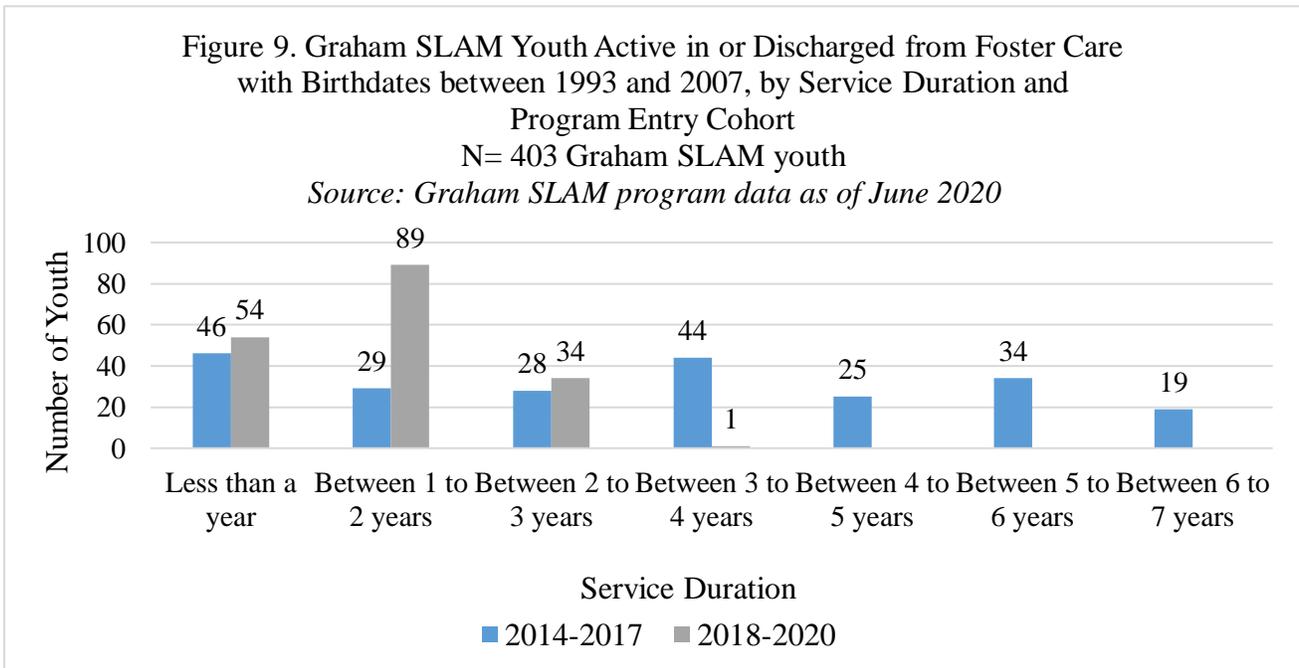
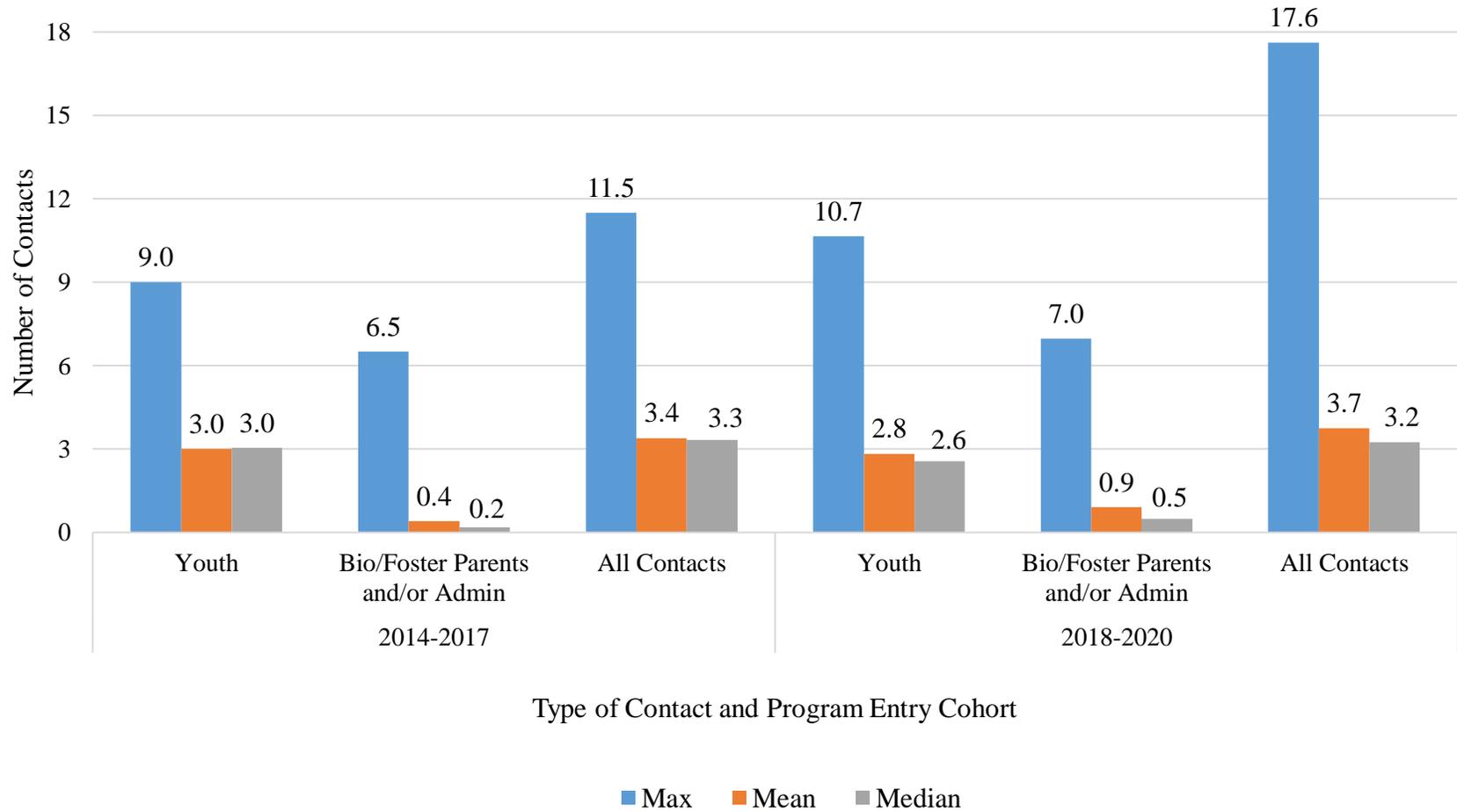


Table 1. Number of contacts coaches made to Graham SLAM youth, parents, and agencies during program enrollment (N =403)

Contact Methods	Program Entry Cohort							
	2014-2017				2018-2020			
	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum
<b>Contacts to Youth</b>								
<i>Face to Face</i>	36	28	0	202	13	7	0	118
<i>Phone</i>	24	19	0	138	7	4	0	50
<i>Email</i>	5	2	0	77	2	0	0	27
<i>Video</i>	1	0	0	26	4	1	0	30
<i>Text</i>	53	39	0	223	28	20	0	150
<i>Attempted but not successful</i>	19	12	0	103	18	14	0	86
<b>Total Contacts (excludes attempted) - All Youth</b>	119	97	0	483	54	42	0	245
<b>Contacts to Parents</b>								
<i>Foster Parent (FP)</i>	2	0	0	22	3	0	0	52
<i>Biological Parent (BP)</i>	1	0	0	26	1	0	0	77
<i>Total -Foster Care Agencies (Admin)</i>	9	4	0	88	11	6	0	127
<b>Total Contacts - BFPAdmin</b>	12	6	0	93	15	8	0	160
<b>All Contacts Total</b>	131	110	0	520	69	53	1	405
<b>Monthly Averages (Contacts/Months Enrolled)</b>								
<i>Youth</i>	3	3	0	9	3	3	0	11
<i>BP, FP, and/or Admin</i>	0	0	0	7	1	0	0	7
<i>All Contacts</i>	3	3	0	12	4	3	0	18

Figure 10. Average Monthly Contacts Graham Coaches Made,  
by Program Entry Cohort and Type  
N= 403 Graham SLAM youth  
Source: Graham SLAM program data as of June 2020



## *The Door*

Similar to Graham participants, we also observed variability in youths' enrollment in The Door, as well as the types of programming and services they were engaged in during their program enrollment. Of The Door participants who were enrolled during 2018-2021, 316 (66%) enrolled in The Door for more than six months (see Figure 11). While The Door does not track contact methods and the number of contacts made with youth since program enrollment like Graham SLAM described above, The Door tracks youths' training, college, and employment placement types, as well as youths' status for all placement types.

Most of The Door participants experienced some type of career development. Of the 478 The Door participants, 196 (41%) had at least one paid internship placement, 105 (22%) had at least one permanent employment placement, and 91 (19%) had enrolled in a training program. Of The Door participants, 253 (53%) had more than one type of training, college, and employment placement type while enrolled in The Door programming.

In terms of The Door's placement status tracking, there were a total of 596 placements for the 478 The Door participants, 511 (86%) of which were closed and 85 (14%) of which were still open at the time of data extraction. Of the same 596 placements, 280 (47%) already completed the placement or program or graduate from their training program successfully, and 82 (14%) are still actively employed or enrolled in training program (see Figure 12). Of the same 596 placements, 448 (75%) started prior to April 1, 2020.

Finally, youth accessed different types of services at The Door (see Figure 13). Of the 478 The Door participants, 435 (91%) received supportive services, 102 (21%) received academic services, 169 (34%) received career services, 234 (49%) received housing services, and 199 (42%) received physical and mental health services. Within supportive services, more than half (59%) of The Door participants received orientation about the comprehensive services that The Door provides at the beginning of their program enrollment, while 193 (40%) received basic needs services and 99 (21%) received benefits navigation. Within academic services, 59 (12%) received college access service, followed by 50 (10%) adult basic education. There were slightly more participants enrolled in career services, where 137 (29%) and 74 (15%) of The Door participants were enrolled in work readiness and occupation skill training, respectively. For housing services provided by MAP, almost half (49%) of The Door participants received housing case management from their program staff, and 103 (22%) were referred to shelter, temporary, or

permanent housing during their program enrollment. Finally, 194 (41%) of participants also received other services provided by the Bronx Academy (BYC Services in Figure 15).

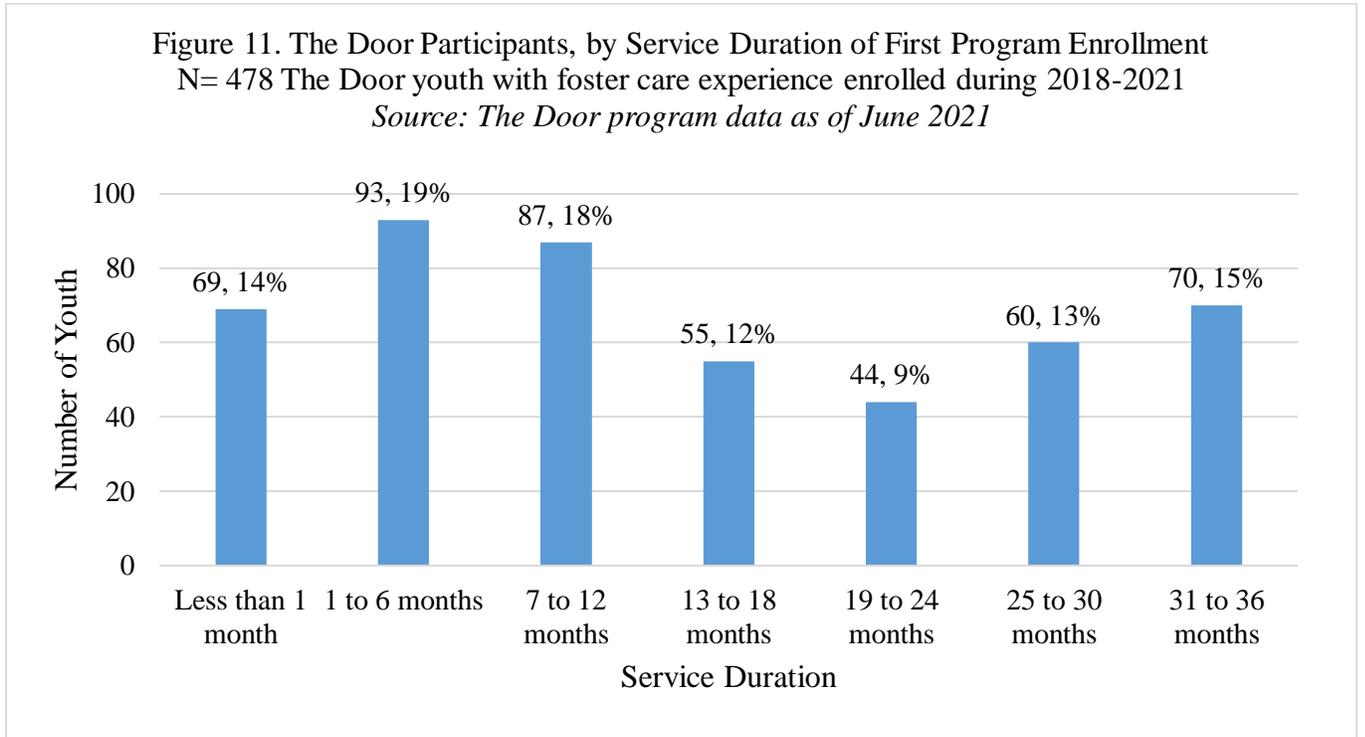
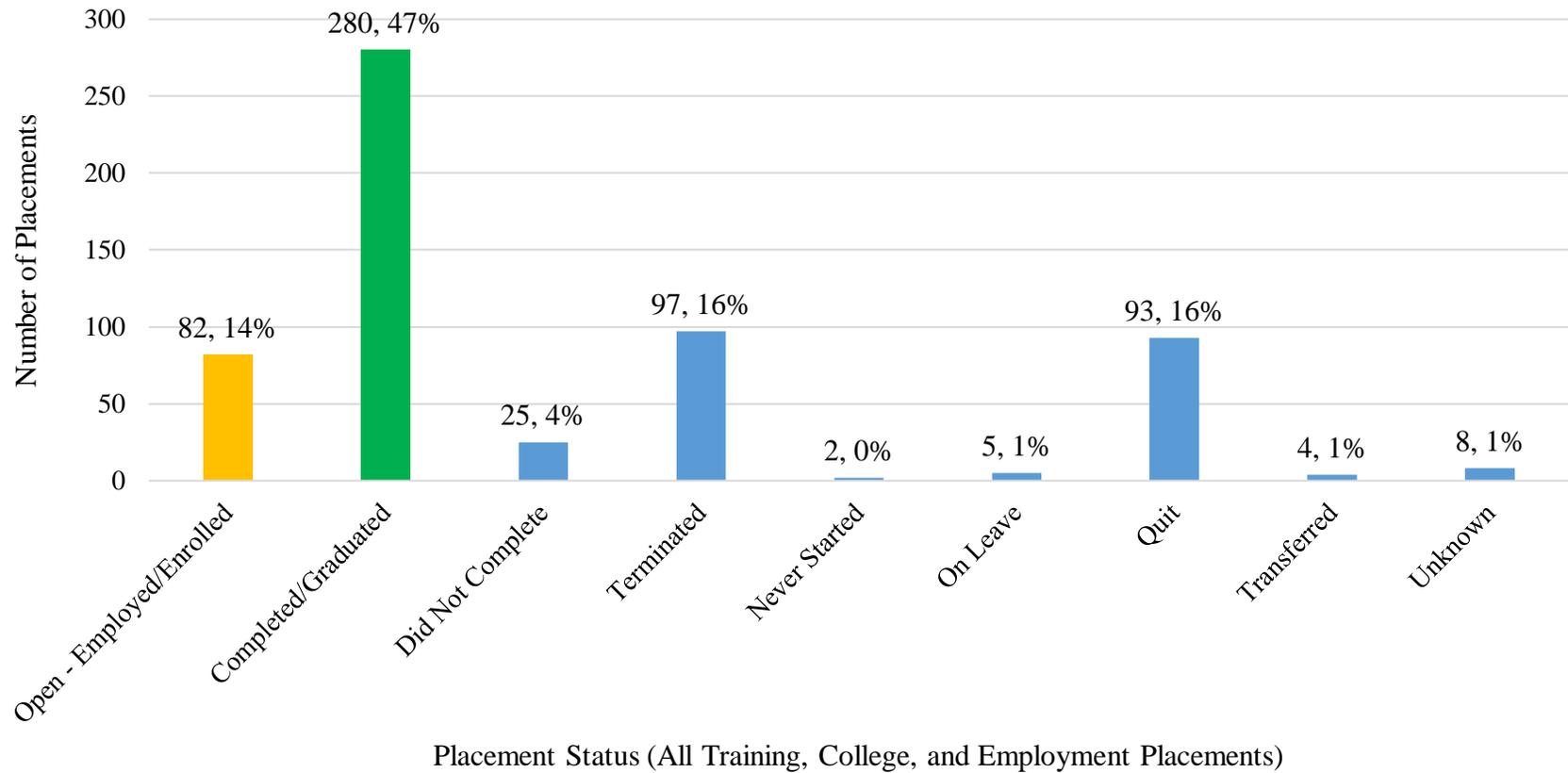


Figure 12. The Door Participants' Most Recent Placement Status for All Training, College, and Employment Placements  
 N= 596 placements from 478 The Door youth with foster care experience  
 Source: The Door program data as of June 2021

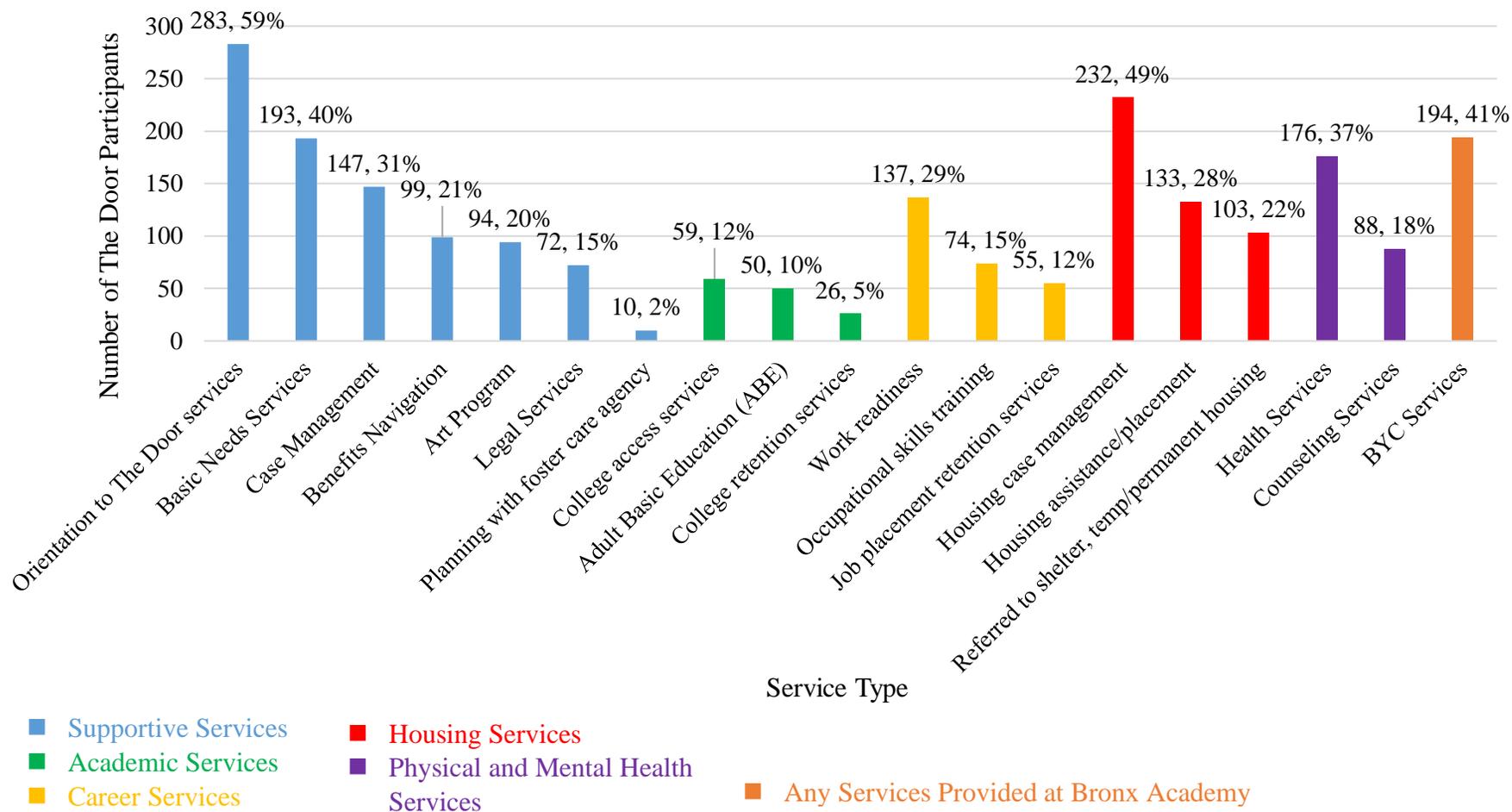


Note: Percentages are out of the 596 placements total.

Figure 13. The Door Youth Active in or Discharged from Foster Care Enrolled during 2018-2021, by Service Type

N= 478 The Door youth with foster care experience

Source: The Door program data as of June 2021



Note: Because youth can access more than one service type depending on their goals and needs, percentages do not add up to 100. Percentages are out of the 478 The Door participants.

In addition to the insight on program models we gathered through data collected from the two programs, staff interviews revealed how staff trainings fit into The Door and Graham SLAM's models, as well as the barriers to youth engagement each program faced during COVID-19.

### Staff Trainings

The Door's initial onboarding process is less structured and more informal. As one staff member described, the first month on the job is "trial and error and training. But in terms of not meeting with young people and just learning the paperwork and the logistical things, it's like the first two weeks." During the Year 1 interviews, some of The Door staff voiced desires to have more "outside training...[with] people who have a wider range of perspective" and to have more technical trainings on complicated issues such as incarcerated youth and immigration. However, as briefly noted in Finding 1, coaches expressed during their Year 2 interviews that there was no additional training added beyond their mandatory "general stuff [they] have to go through... every single year."

Coaches at Graham SLAM reported in their Year 1 interviews that they have a more structured onboarding and training program that includes motivational interviewing, collaborative problem-solving, identifying and supporting young people who have been sexually exploited, and more. Additionally, the Fair Futures provided Graham and supervisors at other foster care providers with additional training on how to onboard and supervise new coaches, but The Door did not. Both supervisors and coaches in Fair Futures participate in implementation learning communities that allow for additional training, sharing of best practices, and problem-solving of specific issues.

During their year 2 interviews, coaches at Graham SLAM expressed appreciation for the Care4 platform that was provided to them through Fair Futures. Some coaches mentioned that they felt the platform and the cross-agency training sessions created "a community of learning... for the coaches, the supervisors, the specialists, the directors and supervisors... it's really nice to be able to be in a setting with other likeminded folks who are trying to do the same work." Research staff facilitated conversations between The Door and Fair Futures staff to discuss training issues, and coaches expressed a desire for "really rigorous, intense and intentional training" that goes beyond the mandatory onboarding lessons. Additional trainings that address

areas such as how to maintain contact with youth could have lessened the subsequent obstacles faced during the pandemic.

## Engagement Barriers During the Pandemic

### *Getting into contact*

Staff from both programs utilized multiple forms of contact to engage youth participants. Mainly, coaches relied on social media to reach participants because many do not have an email address or cell phone. Additionally, Graham SLAM staff mentioned in their Year 1 interviews that they often reached out to other adults who are in the youths' lives, such as "their health home's coordinator, their case planners, their foster parent, the supervisor in case planning, the FTC coordinator, anyone that has seen or heard or can help [them] reach this youth." While the two programs have different engagement approaches, they both faced new obstacles as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, due to a lack of connection with Fair Futures, as well as a lack of structure toward youth engagement, the Door's decentralized approach led to a lack of current youth contact information. A coach from the Bronx Academy expressed:

I can say that's something that we're constantly having an issue with is just trying to conceive that engagement. Because some people get locked out of touch. There's no phone number. If their phone numbers are off... I usually email them. And sometimes they'll answer through that way, if they're able to still get internet...it's just hard.

### *No access to physical space*

Similarly, participants' inability to access The Door's physical locations and their communication options being reduced to virtual contact diminished staffs' sense of connectedness to youth. In December 2020, a coach from the Manhattan Academy Plus (MAP) stated:

Whereas now, I think, with us having limited access, we've lost touch with a lot of youth that used to come into the building. I don't think we realized before how important it is to have updated cell phone numbers and email addresses to make sure that those things stayed up to date. We see that now. So, we've lost touch with a lot of young people who were frequently visiting the space... And it's really hard to locate where they are now.

### *Oversaturating contact with youth*

In contrast, some Graham SLAM coaches reported that their coaching structure was too overbearing and might push youth away. During the pandemic, the coaches needed to increase their required check-ins due to youth walk-ins being prohibited, and one coach explained that

“oversaturating the engagement is really what kind of makes us lose the youth... we have to just keep sort of harassing them...And I think that’s a little too much.”

### *Strong participant-staff relationships*

However, when staff were able to stay connected to youth, they expressed that it was usually because of a strong relationship built before the pandemic and collaboration with outside agencies that were also connected to the youth. A staff member from Graham SLAM reflected on the importance of pre-established relationships by saying:

The thing that I did realize is the kids who already were connected to a coach before COVID who had a really strong relationship, there was no shift in their communication because there was rapport there. ...The kids who were newer with newer coaches, that took a little bit more work because there’s a [lack of] trust.

Strong participant-staff relationships were able to support youth success during such a difficult year. The foster youth population often lack consistency regarding their housing circumstances and personal support systems, and:

A lot of times, [for] foster youth or justice-involved youth...knowing that they have a dedicated program or space just for them where everybody around knows the feeling of what they went through, I think it allows them to open up and see the possibilities.

Staff reported that it is imperative to build these participant-staff relationships early in the program. Strong bonds between coaches and youth have been shown to increase engagement and youth success (Blakeslee et al., 2020; Powers et al., 2018), but these bonds take time to create. Youth are matched with a coach by a supervisor at intake based on youth’s initial needs, but a coach from Graham SLAM mentioned that “a lot of times [they] switch off youth,” which decreases the amount of time spent between coaches and youth to build trust. Youth may benefit from a “matching process during intake instead of just giving a youth a coach... because the youth maybe identify with one of us more than the other.”

Finding 3: Coaches responded to youths' direct needs during the COVID-19 pandemic by creating flexible workshops and services, which were necessary for older youth success.

#### Transitioning to Virtual Engagement

The COVID-19 pandemic put the entire country in a state of unrest. As a result of NYC closing schools, businesses, and many government agencies, this vulnerable population of youths was severely impacted. Staff members from The Door shared that:

Kids with [a] foster care background have this big thing in common... definitely with COVID... pretty much the fear of maybe their foster parents not being able to support them or their friends where they're couch-surfing having to ask them to leave... I do feel like [these situations] would turn them a little bit more to activities that could get them involved with the justice system to survive and to pretty much be able to eat and everything.

In the beginning of the pandemic, The Door was only open for emergency services and for limited hours, which made engaging new participants for enrollment difficult. However, the Manhattan Academy Plus (MAP) location saw higher active and sustained engagement within their programs compared to previous quarters. According to one respondent,

“23 young people attended 252 work readiness workshops, which is more than an average of 10 workshops per young person. 32 young people had 541 housing case management appointments during the past quarter, which is nearly an average of 17 contacts per young person. Clearly, for a core group of MAP participants, MAP staff and services were essential to helping them get through the COVID quarantine.”

Graham SLAM was able to recruit and enroll 32 new youth participants despite the obstacles of remote programming, surpassing their cumulative target for the quarter.

#### Creating New Services

Although the pandemic created obstacles for the programs to operate and provide necessary services, The Door and Graham SLAM anticipated youths' needs and used available resources to stay ahead of prospective challenges. For example, a large portion of youth worked in the service and retail industries, which were largely affected by unemployment during the pandemic. As a response to this, Graham SLAM created a “Summer for Service” virtual paid internship to supplement any monetary loss experienced. Similarly, The Door responded by providing resources outside of the building to ensure youth were able to benefit from their services during the pandemic. For example, staff spoke of “a resource text line as well as a crisis text line. So... if it's after 5, they can reach out through this text line if they needed help with

something.” There were also mentions of specialized teams, such as the housing support team, creating external resources to “provide essential services including having managers coming into the building to distribute food and hygiene packages to young people.”

Both programs were able to adjust to the pandemic by creating virtual programs and services. Graham SLAM and The Door relied on each other to accommodate youths’ needs while figuring out how to navigate remote services. For example, a coach from Graham mentioned that:

Within two to three months, The Door had already started doing virtual classes, started putting stuff together for kids to continue doing GED and programming. So... we referred a lot of our kids to their programming for the task program because they were able to take place virtually. ...The fact that they were just a reliable source... really helped the kids in giving them devices or helping them get metro cards or helping them to be able to cover internet bills to help them actually be able to complete the classes was really great.

Although some youth struggled to adapt to online learning, virtual services provided more opportunities for youth to participate in the programs. One challenge mentioned by coaches in Year 1 was reliable transportation options. A coach from Graham SLAM shared that “we have Metro card stacks, but sometimes they run out very quickly and so transportation is also [a barrier].” Remote services, check-ins, and internships provided through Zoom allowed youth to participate anywhere consistently while increasing communication between coaches and youth. A coach from The Door expressed their appreciation for virtual programming and said “I have been able to engage with my youth better than I have ever before. Now... I can talk to them more often because everyone is basically home, they’re not off at work. So, it has been so much better.”

Both programs were able to provide the necessary services to support youth during such a tough year. For example, coaches from both programs expressed their amazement at how many youths were still able to “earn their high school equivalency degree,” “complete internal internships virtually,” and “successfully apply to college” despite the pandemic (see Figure 14). These positive outcomes would likely not have been possible without the creative and flexible initiative of the coaches and staff.

A great example of the innovative ways Graham SLAM met several needs of their foster youth population was through its “This Is America” workshop. This workshop was created in response to the murder of George Floyd and was “geared towards [educating youth about] the

history of African Americans, including what is going on in the present and what can be done for the future.” The space allowed for youth to talk about their frustrations regarding policing and protests, as well as provide emotional support for one another. Finally, “the youth were able to get \$600 for attending eight sessions,” which not only increased participation within the programs but also eased some accumulative stress for youth who lost their jobs due to the pandemic.

**Finding 4: The Door and Graham SLAM exhibited successful program implementation: hundreds of youths have been served since evaluation began, both programs were fully staffed, and staff demonstrated a strong commitment to working with youth.**

While the nature of the work itself and the unexpected consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic caused both The Door and Graham SLAM to contend with many difficulties while serving youth, both agencies have exhibited successful program implementation. As displayed in Finding 1, The Door locations served 478 youth between 2018-2021 and Graham SLAM served 403 youth between 2014-2020.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the programs are both fully staffed with administrators, coaches, and housing, employment, and education specialists. Neither program experienced staffing shortages since the evaluation began.

Staff are highly committed to helping the challenging population the programs serve; many explained that they are fulfilling their “calling” by working with FYTA. A coach at The Door echoed this sentiment, saying, “I always knew that I always wanted to work with youth. I didn’t know what age. I’ve worked with little, small children all the way up to middle school and then it was not until I worked in foster care I was like, ‘This is the population I want to serve.’” Having program staff who are fully invested in the work and motivated rather than discouraged by its challenges is essential to successful implementation, especially during an acute crisis such as COVID-19. A Graham SLAM staff member explained, “I’d never worked with high school and so I wanted to work with older youth...I wanted to work with you know a more challenging demographic.” Program staff at The Door and Graham SLAM displayed the flexibility, fortitude, and compassion necessary to support youth and guide them towards rewarding outcomes.

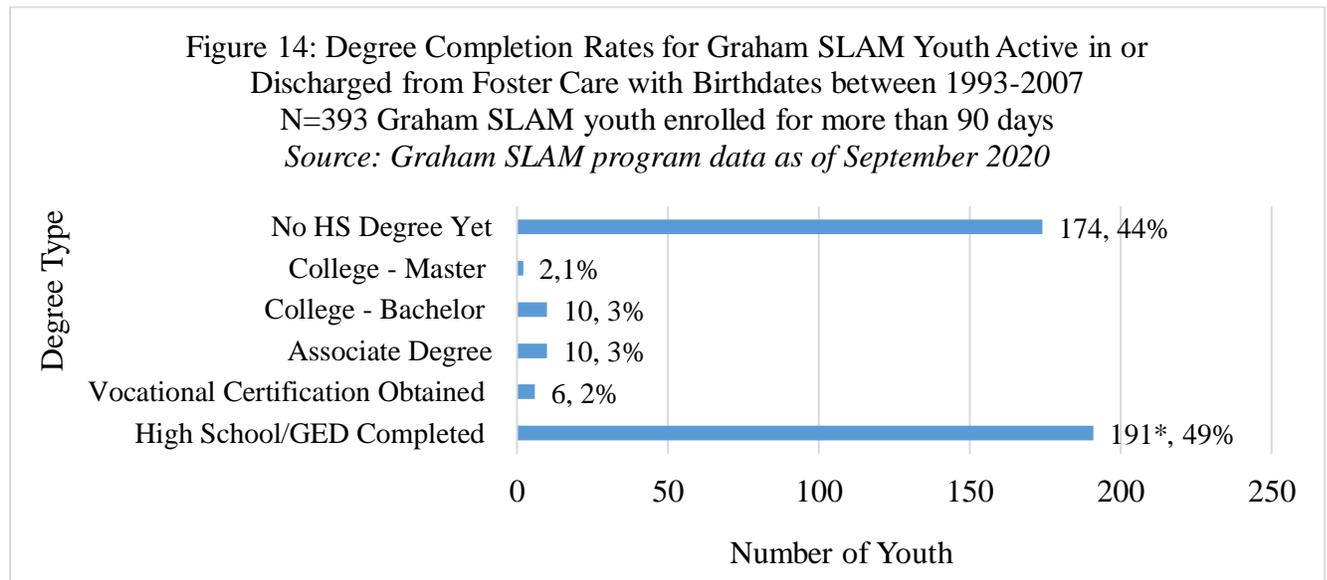
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<sup>23</sup> Programs provided data from different time frames.

## Program Data on Youth Outcomes

### Graham SLAM

While we expect to be able to report more detail on program participants' outcomes during the upcoming Outcome Evaluation, preliminary data on Graham SLAM participants' employment status and degree completion show youths' employment and educational attainment in reaching their goals. Of 393 Graham SLAM participants enrolled for more than 90 days, 191 (49%) have completed high school or received their GED (See Figure 14).



\*Note: Because the percentages are out of the 393 Graham SLAM youth who enrolled for more than 90 days and can obtain more than one degree, the percentages do not sum to 100. Of the same 393 SLAM participants, 71 (18%) had completed HS/GED at the time of enrollment.

### The Door

As required by DANY funding, The Door tracked one-year outcomes of participants who enrolled in MAP programming between 2018 and 2021. Using The Door program data received, below we present MAP participants' educational attainment, housing, criminal justice involvement, and employment status at baseline (upon enrollment) and one-year follow-up for MAP participants who reached their one-year enrollment date before data extraction (June 30, 2021, N=292 MAP participants; see Figures 15 to 19). At one-year follow-up, Figure 16 shows that 74 (25%) of the MAP participants either completed high school or already completed high

school prior to program enrollment, and 44 (14%) were still enrolled in high school or equivalent at their one-year follow-up.

Second, we observed a slight increase in the percentage of MAP participants living in permanent housing independently at their one-year follow-up (from 4% at baseline to 10% at one-year follow-up) and those living in a transitional housing or residential facility (from 7% at baseline to 11% at one-year follow-up). We also observed an increase in the percentage of MAP participants living in permanent housing independently, from 11 (4%) at baseline to 28 (10%) at one-year follow-up. Of the MAP participants, 45 (15%) were living with biological/adopted family or with a foster family (see Figure 17).

Third, there was a decrease in the number of MAP participants reported to have criminal justice involvement within the past year, from 78 (26%) of MAP participants at baseline to 12 (4%) at the one-year follow-up (see Figure 18). Finally, MAP participants' employment status was also tracked for ISLG reporting (see Figure 19). At baseline, there were 111 (38%) who were not working but reported to be interested in finding employment at enrollment, and only 24 (8%) were working full time or part-time. At the one-year follow-up, we observed that 69 (24%) of MAP participants reported working full time or part-time. In addition, another 17 (6%) reported being in school full time or part-time at the one-year follow up.

Despite some of the improvements we observed from the program data provided, one of the limitations of the one-year outcome data described above is there is a large proportion of MAP participants whose status at the one-year follow-up was not reported or unknown to program staff during data entry due to various reasons (e.g., no longer enrolled, lost contact, or chose not to disclose to program staff about their status). Additionally, anyone who only enrolled in BA programming was not tracked, as DANY only funded MAP programming. Therefore, it is important for Action Research to focus its analytic capacity on the outcome evaluation as the next step of the FYTA evaluation described at the end of the report. Action Research will examine the impact of The Door programming on the abovementioned youth outcomes using administrative data from various city agencies.

Figure 15. The Door MAP Youth Active in or Discharged from Foster Care Enrolled between 2018-2021: Educational Attainment at Enrollment  
 Source: The Door program data as of June 2021

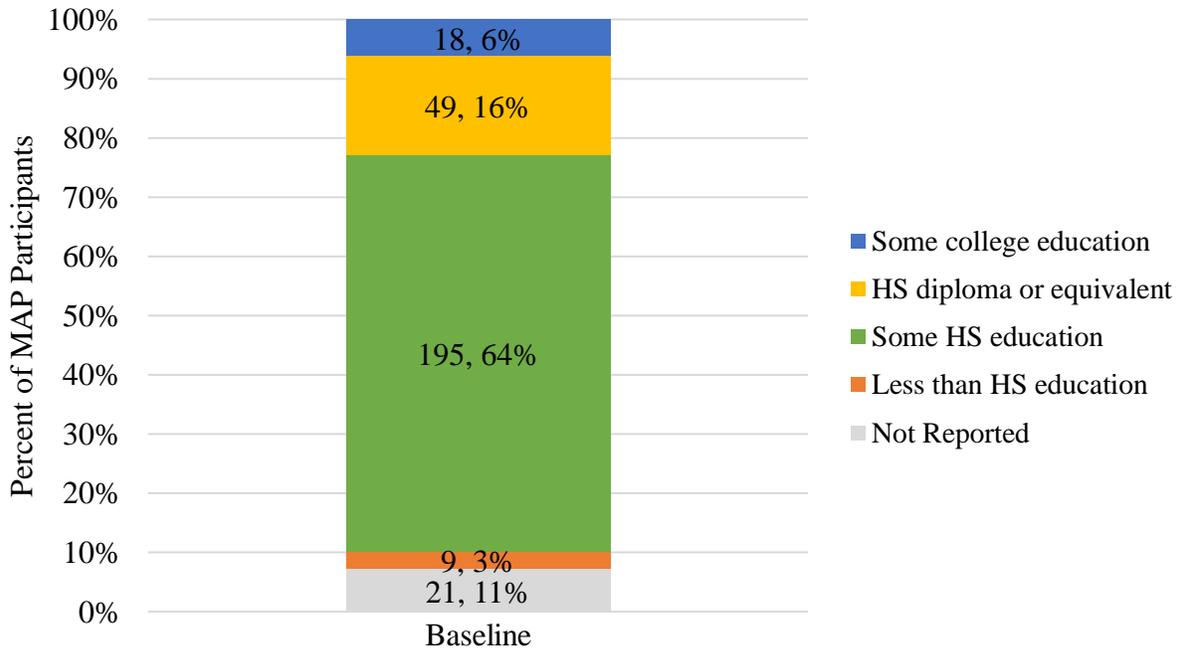


Figure 16. The Door MAP Participants Enrolled between 2018-2021: Educational Attainment at One Year Follow Up  
 N=292 The Door MAP youth with foster care experience  
 Source: The Door program data as of June 2021

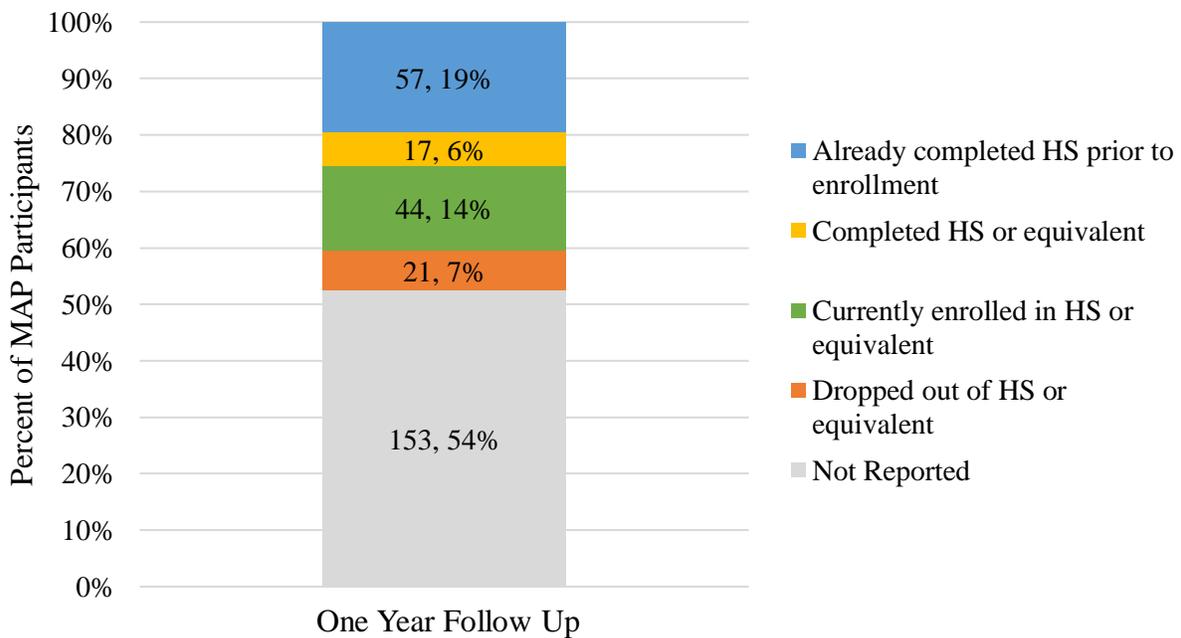


Figure 17. The Door MAP Participants Enrolled 2018-2021: Housing Status at Enrollment vs. One Year Follow Up

N=292 The Door MAP youth with foster care experience

Source: The Door program data as of June 2021

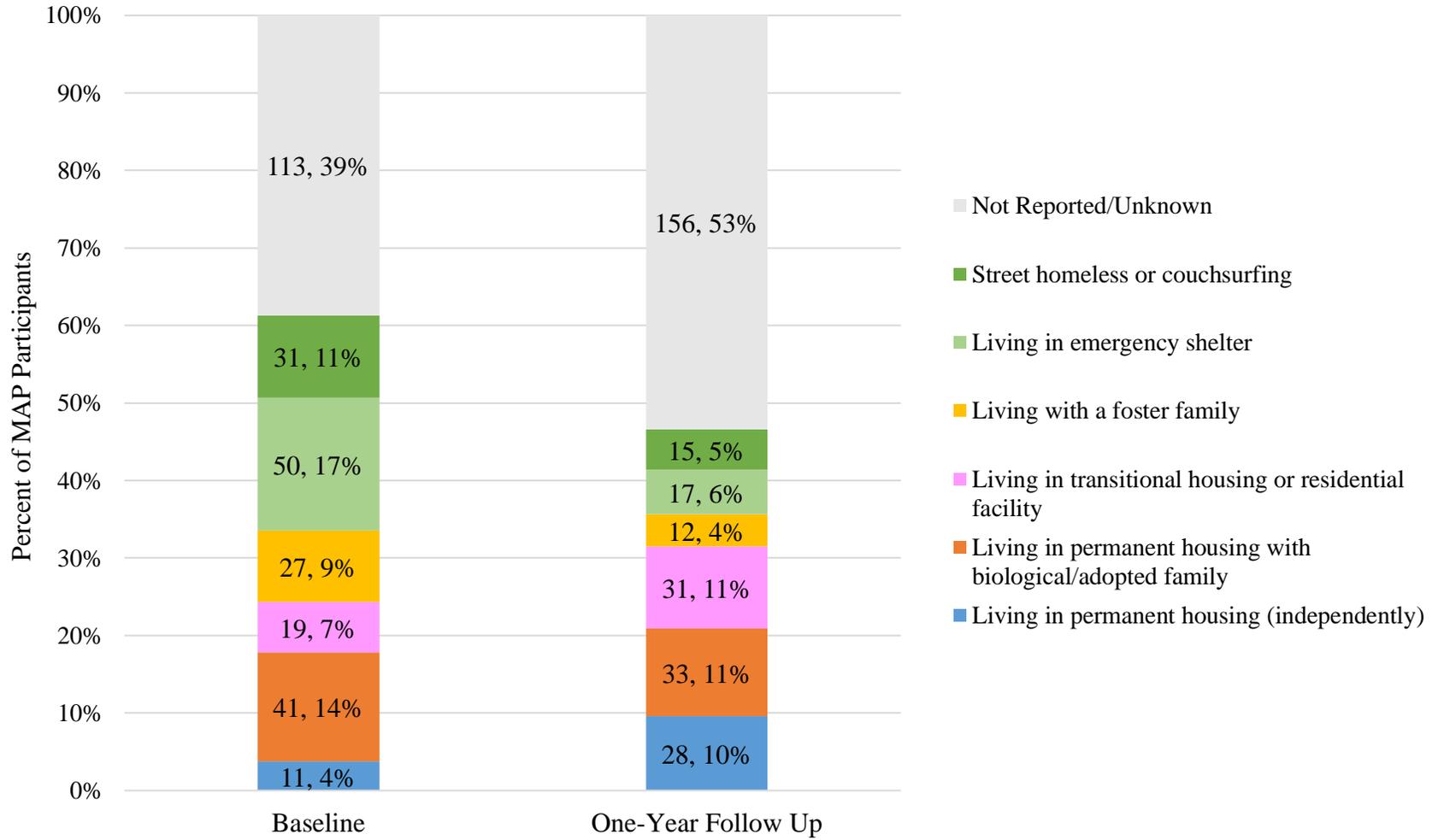


Figure 18. The Door MAP Participants Enrolled between 2018-2021: Criminal Justice Involvement at Enrollment vs. One Year Follow Up

N=292 The Door MAP youth with foster care experience

Source: The Door program data as of June 2021

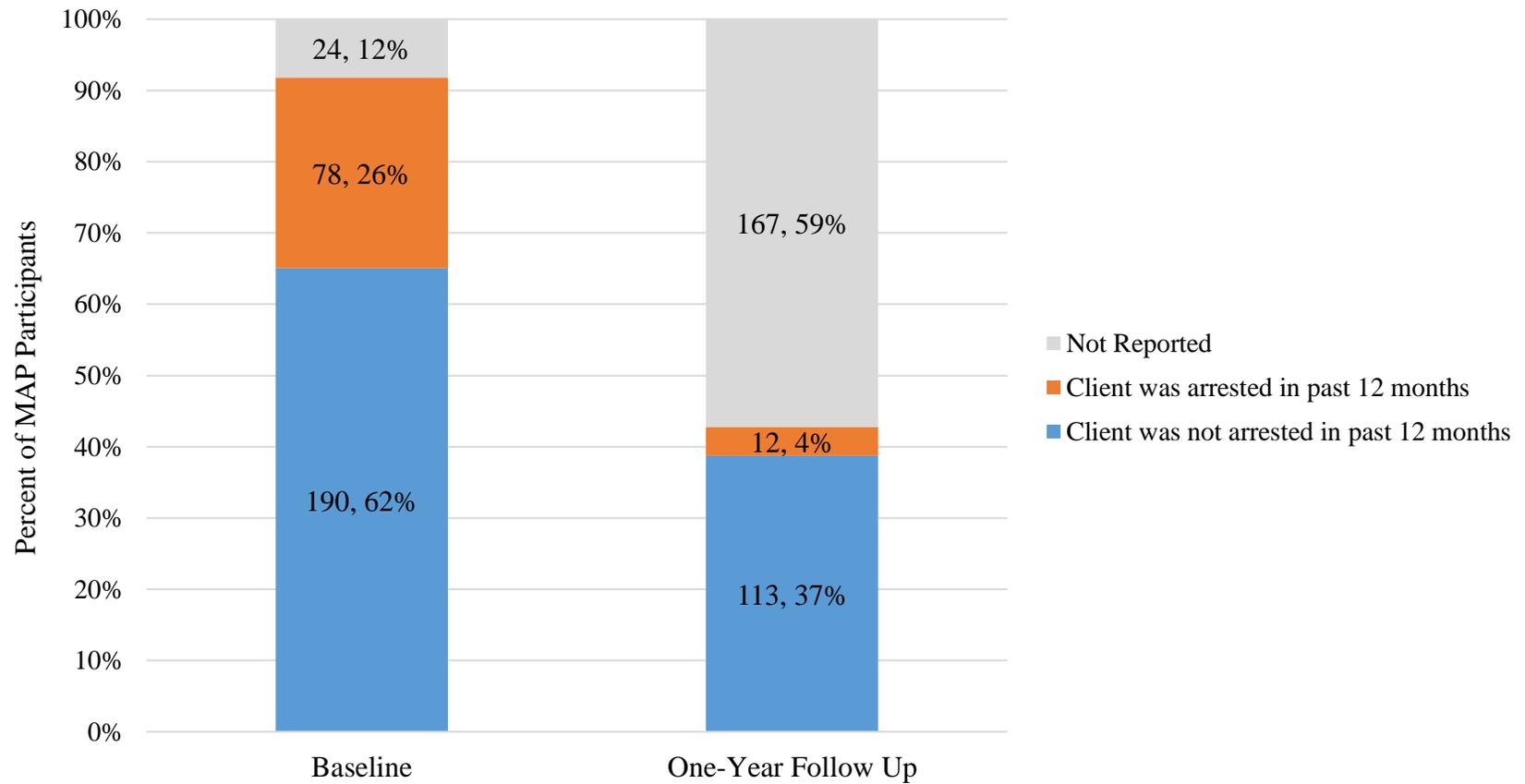
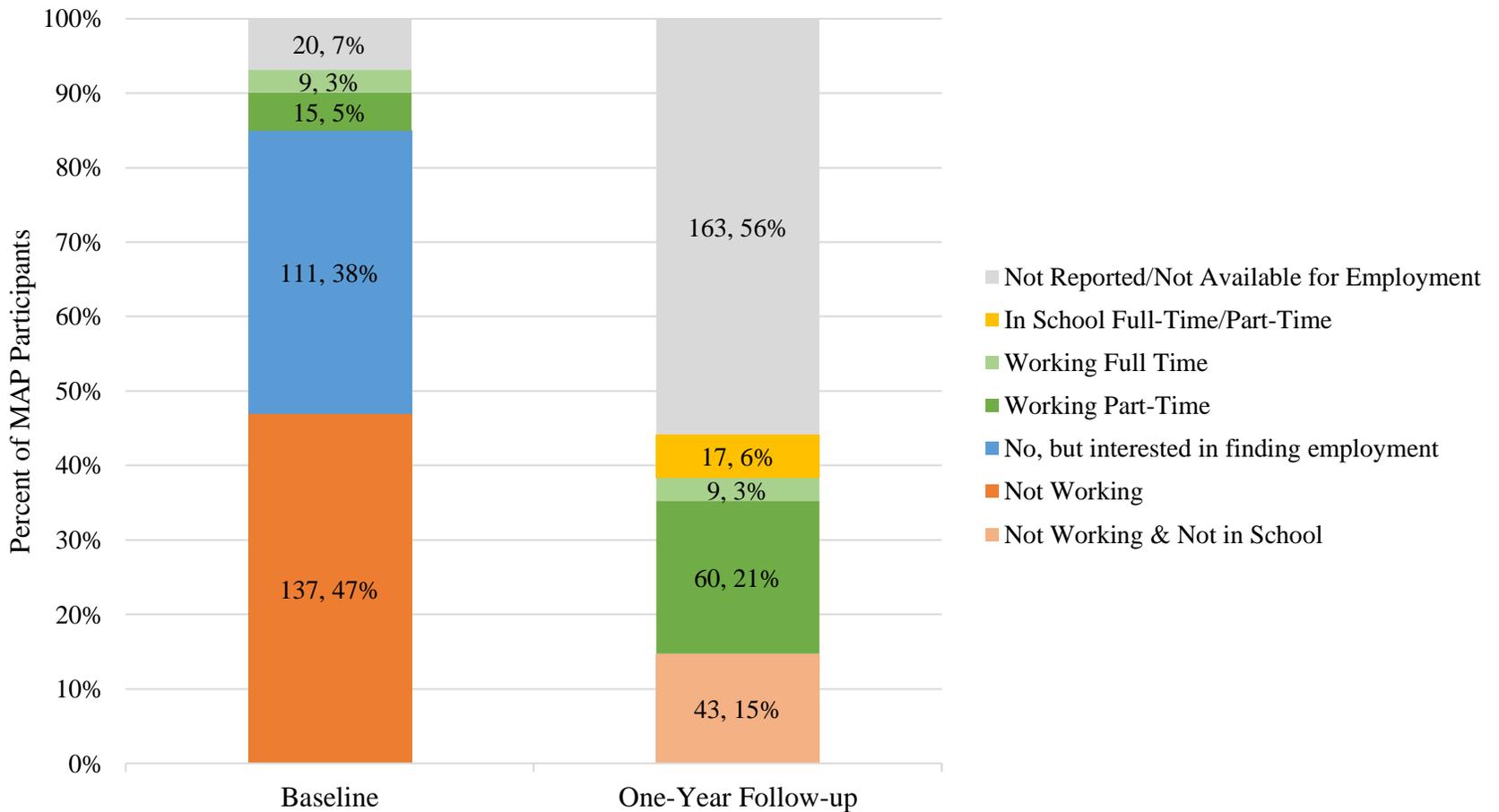


Figure 19. The Door MAP Participants Enrolled between 2018-2021: Employment Status at Enrollment vs. One Year Follow Up

N=292 The Door MAP youth with foster care experience

Source: The Door program data as of June 2021



\*Note. Percentage totals do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

## Discussion and Recommendations

While we continue to work to obtain the administrative data to examine the impact of Graham SLAM and The Door programming on youth outcomes for the outcome evaluation, we gained insights about serving older youth with foster care experiences from our data analyses on the program data from both programs during Years 1 and 2 and our interviews with program staff. We also learned about the characteristics of NYC foster youth from our data analyses on ACS's foster care administrative data. Below we summarize these findings and provide some recommendations suggested by program staff from both programs.

*Recommendation 1: Ensure youths' access to culturally sensitive mental health services and supports as one of the key elements in older youth programming.*

Our analyses and interviews with program staff at both programs suggest older youths' mental health is a major concern. We believe it is essential for the programs' current coaching model to continue to ensure that all coaches, including those in specialized service areas, are trauma-informed and capable of teaching youth coping strategies and providing general mental wellness resources. However, it is necessary for older youth programs to recognize that, while coaches are skilled mentors and service providers, they are not mental health or medical professionals. Staff from both The Door and Graham SLAM felt the need for youth to have access to culturally competent mental health professionals that "look like" the youth or have similar life experiences, although we recognize the availability of therapists is an ongoing struggle. This need was further highlighted during Year 2 interviews when program staff also recommended that telehealth therapy implemented during the pandemic should remain available to participants as part of the programming. To holistically and successfully care for and support youth aging out of foster care, we suggest that programs ensure that youth have access to professional mental health services from culturally competent staff to increase youth's program engagement and success in various outcomes.

*Recommendation 2: Ensure that youth have the opportunity to cultivate relationships with adults and have an active voice in their engagement.*

Coaches from both programs expressed that there is room for improvement regarding engagement strategies between the coaches and youth. As previously mentioned, coaches have recommended that adding a matching component into the intake process would be beneficial because youth might feel more comfortable and supported by someone with whom they have

things in common. Allowing youth to shape their experience by choosing a coach who matches their preferred coaching style and personality could increase engagement within both programs.

This youth-guided approach would likely help to reduce engagement challenges. Furthermore, both programs should continue to collaborate and ensure that providers are purposeful and proactive in helping youth establish relationships with adults, incorporate youth voices into that process, and be on the lookout for ways to ensure that the connections take place. The need for intra-agency communication and collaboration only increased during the pandemic as a necessity for future success at engaging older youth within both programs. We suggest that programs review their operations to ensure that youth have the opportunity to shape their relationship with their coaches.

*Recommendation 3: Programs should continue to provide virtual services post-pandemic to create flexible opportunities for youth engagement.*

The evaluation team was impressed with the speed, creativity, and flexibility that The Door and Graham SLAM exhibited in response to the pandemic. Moving forward, we recommend that The Door and Graham SLAM continue many of the creative and flexible problem-solving strategies implemented. For example, we recommend that both programs keep virtual engagement and service delivery options for their youth to participate in check-ins, internships, therapy, and workshops. Virtual options created more opportunities for youth with transportation or mental health issues to participate from a safer and accessible location and appear to be cost-effective.

## Roadmap to Outcome Evaluation

Moving forward, we will focus our data collection and analytic capacity on the outcome evaluation for the final evaluation report, which consists of two components: [1] administrative data analysis of critical youth outcomes, and [2] survey data collection/analyses and program youth interviews. The outcome evaluation will aim to answer the follow research questions:

1. Program impact: Do older youth transitioning out of foster care who enroll in MAP, Bronx Academy, or Graham SLAM have better outcomes (defined below) across several domains compared to similar older youth who did not enroll in these programs?

2. Dosage: Do older youth transitioning out of foster care who receive larger doses of services from MAP, Bronx Academy, or Graham SLAM have better outcomes than older youth who receive smaller doses of services from these programs?

During Years 1 and 2 of the FYTA Evaluation, we worked on obtaining administrative data and constructed the propensity-score matched comparison groups for the entire population of youth described earlier. During Year 2, we received approvals and began the youth survey and interview recruitment planning process with program staff at both programs for participant youth data collection.

As of June 2021, CIDI and Action Research have signed and fully executed a Data Use Agreement (DUA) with DANY, ISLG, and the New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) to access DHS and NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) administrative data. Data from DHS will be used to examine both family and single adult homeless shelter stays between the two comparison groups. On the other hand, data from HRA will contain information on older youths' access to cash assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). We will continue to work with CIDI to arrange access to administrative data from the NYC Department of Correction, NYC Department of Education, and New York State Department of Labor to examine older youth's outcomes in justice system involvement, educational attainment, and income. Due to the pandemic, data from the New York Department of Health Statewide Planning and Research Cooperative System (SPARCS) may not be available for the FYTA evaluation. We will continue to work with CIDI on data access issues for the outcome evaluation.

After obtaining the administrative data from the different city government agencies, we will use Propensity Score Matching (PSM) to match program participants (treatment) to similar non-program older youth (comparison, or treatment as usual). ACS provided the foster care data of the whole program-eligible youth *population* defined earlier and in our evaluation plan. Within the population, the *intervention* group will be older youth between ages 16 to 24 who enroll in MAP, Bronx Academy, and/or the Graham SLAM program. The *comparison* group will be program-eligible youth who do not enroll in any of these three programs but who are otherwise comparable. To construct these two groups of youth within the administrative data, CIDI and Action Research have been working with The Door and Graham SLAM in obtaining program participants' unique identifier data that CIDI can be matched to the administrative data.

Once CIDI matches the client-level program data to the extracted administrative data, CIDI will be able to create a variable field denoting whether a foster youth participated in The Door or Graham SLAM. We will then compare the outcomes of the two groups. This approach addresses selection bias by controlling for observable differences between the two groups using ACS foster care data provided based on our understanding of the NYC child welfare system: [1] age at foster care entry, [2] sex, [3] race, and ethnicity, [4] number of siblings, [5] number of prior removals, [6] lengths of stay in foster care, [7] placement types, and [8] baseline outcome. Both the population-level outcomes and the analyses using PSM will provide valuable information that can be used to refine and improve services to FYTA.

Finally, led by Child Trends, we will conduct a cost-avoidance analysis. The cost-avoidance analysis will examine the government costs avoided/incurred depending on outcomes for youth in CJII programs compared to a PSM matched sample of youth not in these programs. The cost-avoidance analysis will take advantage of our access to administrative data described above.

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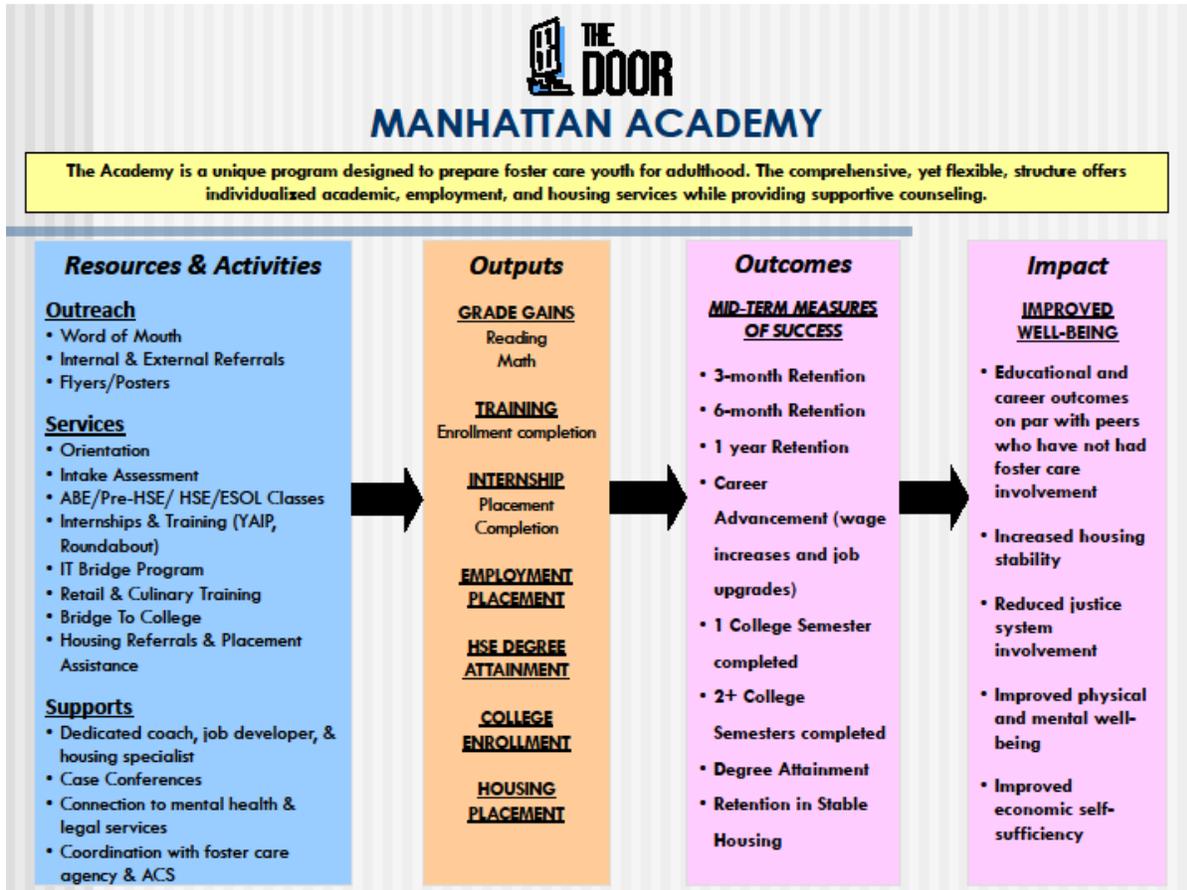
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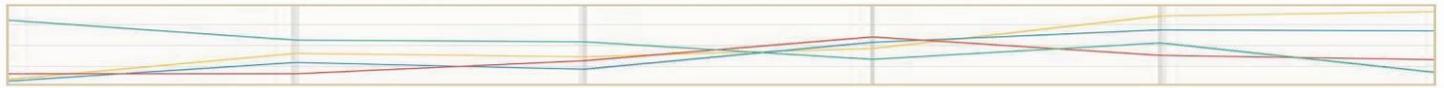
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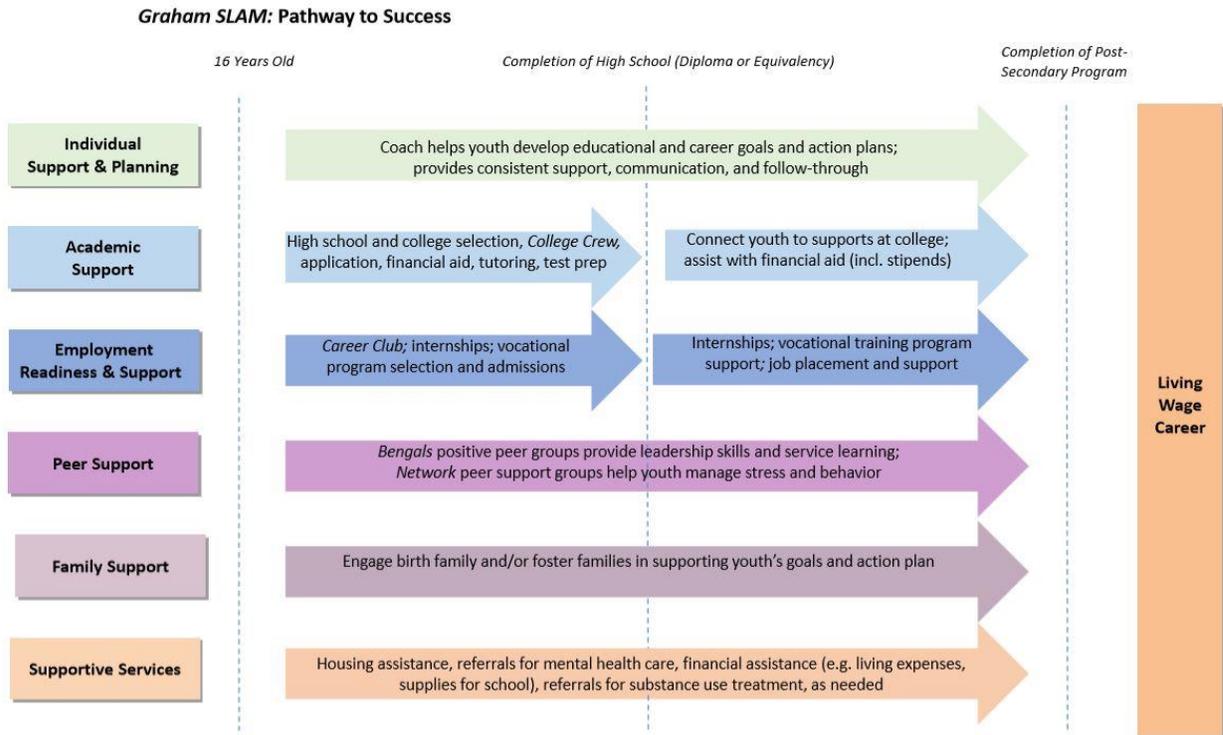
# Appendices

## Appendix A: Logic Model for MAP Created by The Door





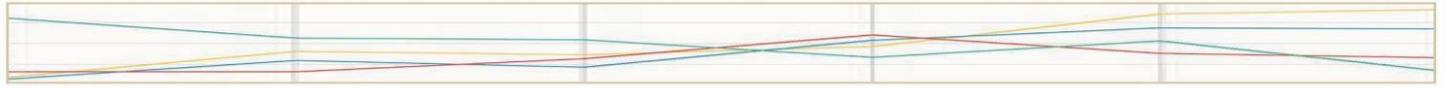
## Appendix B: Logic Model for Graham SLAM Created by Graham Windham



Appendix C: Graham SLAM Program Phases provided by Graham SLAM

**GRAHAM SLAM PROGRAM PHASES**

<b>PHASE</b>	<b>POPULATION</b>	<b>CONTACTS</b>
<b>1) INTENSIVE</b>	All youth new to Graham SLAM Youth who are struggling in high school, TASC program, vocational program or with keeping a job Youth who are out of school who are struggling	Minimum of 4 Contacts in a month <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 in-person</li> <li>• 3 in-person, 1 phone/text/email</li> <li>• 2 in-person, 2 phone/text/email</li> </ul>
<b>2) SUPPORTIVE</b>	High School Students TASC Students Students who have dropped out of school and are working Students in a vocational program College Freshman and College Sophomores	Minimum of 3 Contacts in a month <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 in-person</li> <li>• 2 in-person, 1 phone/text/email</li> <li>• 1 in person, 2 phone/text/email</li> </ul>
<b>3) STABILITY</b>	Students at least two years after high school graduation, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- College juniors and seniors</li> <li>- Post high school, not in college, and are consistently employed</li> <li>- AA/AS and employed</li> <li>- Vocational certificate and employed</li> </ul>	Minimum of 1 Contact in a month <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 in-person</li> <li>• 1 phone/text/email</li> </ul>
<b>4) LAUNCHING</b>	College graduates with a BA/BS and a stable job Youth with a vocational certificate who have had a stable job for a year or longer Students in graduate school	Minimum of 1 Contact in a quarter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 in-person</li> <li>• 1 phone/text/email</li> </ul>

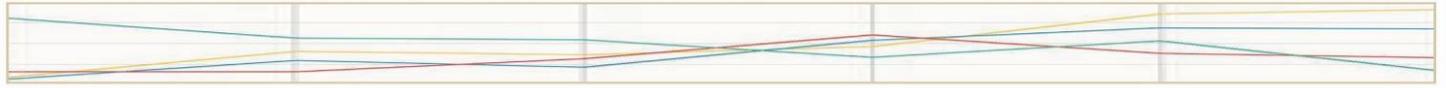


## Appendix D: Human Subject Review Process

During the first year of the evaluation project beginning in April 2019, we focused our capacity in drafting the evaluation plan proposing the research methodology we developed for all three components of the evaluation, based on our grant proposal, as well as our communications with ISLG and program staff from The Door and Graham SLAM. We prepared and drafted all recruitment materials, interview and survey instruments, and consent forms needed for both the process and outcome evaluation and submitted them to Solutions IRB (private IRB) along with the drafted evaluation plan IRB approval on August 26, 2019, after we shared the evaluation plan with ISLG. The Solution IRB review process took around two weeks before we obtained approval from Solution IRB on the process evaluation on September 12, 2019. Then, we submitted the evaluation project to ACS Research Review Committee for their review, while our evaluation was under IRB review. We provided our IRB approval before ACS Research Review Committee began its review process of the evaluation project. The entire ACS review process took around a month before we obtained their conditional approval on October 7, 2019, to young adult surveys. The conditional approval indicated that we were required to obtain OCFS research approval before ACS would grant its final approval on the adult youth focus groups and survey. Therefore, we submitted the study materials to OCFS on October 17, 2019, for their review. The review process was further delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic as government employees went on teleworking and with additional priorities in addressing the pandemic. When all legal documents have been signed and executed by OCFS, BREPA granted the final approval letter for the research project in July 2020.

After we obtained final approval from OCFS, we had to file IRB COVID-19 modifications to convert our research protocols for adult-youth focus groups and survey recruitment to virtual settings to ensure the safety of our research staff and adult youth due to the pandemic. Therefore, we converted our study protocols and materials and filed IRB modifications in September and November 2020 for both adult youth interviews, online surveys, and staff interviews before we could begin our data collection activities. The review process took another month before we obtained all required approvals from IRB, ACS, and OCFS on the modifications of the evaluation project by November 2020.

The evaluation team also worked with city agencies and DANY to execute a data use agreement pertaining to administrative data. The pandemic delayed the review of the agreement



by the parties involved. In May 2021, however, CIDI, Action Research, The New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA), and DANY finalized and signed the core of the data use agreement. Action Research is working with CIDI to have other city agencies such as Education and Corrections join the agreement to gain information about youths' education outcomes, such as high school graduation, and criminal justice involvement.



Appendix E: Program director interview instrument

**CJII Director Interview Guide YEAR 1**

**Introduction:** *Thanks so much for taking the time to talk with us today. I'm [name] and this is [name]. We work at Action Research, which is an independent research organization that provides data analysis and evaluation to improve human services for children, youth, and their families.*

*As you may know, we are partnering with the ISLG (CUNY Institute for Local and State Governance) and DANY (NY County District Attorney's Office) to learn more about how to improve the life trajectories and well-being of youth transitioning out of foster care and into adulthood. Our purpose is to gather information to understand what works for this group of young people and to learn about the challenges of program implementation. Questions will focus on your work at [Graham SLAM/Bronx Academy/MAP]. We are hoping to engage in a deeper conversation with you every year for the next several years, along with some of your front-line staff. This discussion should last about an hour. This is an informal discussion, so please feel free to add in things we don't cover.*

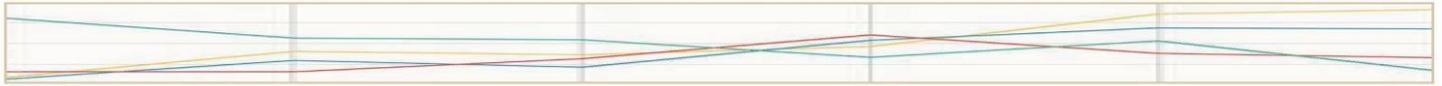
**Consent:** *Your participation in this discussion is voluntary and if you decide to participate, you may skip questions or stop the interview at any time. If at any time you need clarification or do not wish to answer a question, please let me know. All information provided during this conversation will be kept confidential; only Action Research staff will have access to the interview notes and transcripts. If we use quotes in reports to illustrate a point, we will ask you before doing so and confirm the quote. Names will not be attached to quotes.*

*We will be writing down or typing what you say during the interview or, if you agree, we will audio record what you say. The Action Research team will be the only ones who will listen to the recordings, only to catch anything missed during the notetaking. Like the notes, the audio recordings will also be kept anonymous and confidential.*

*[At this time, give participant two copies of the informed consent form and provide them time to go through it in as much detail as they want and have them sign the form when ready.]*

*Thanks again for sharing your time and your thoughts. Before we get started, do you have any questions for us? Just to confirm with you, do we have your permission to record this discussion?*

*[Wait until you receive a verbal YES and both copies the participant's signed consent form agreeing to record the interview. Interviewer should also sign both copies and return one copy to the participants for their records.]*



**Participant Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Program** (circle one): Graham SLAM / Bronx Academy / MAP **Role:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Best way to contact you to confirm a quote, if necessary:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewer Name(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Start Time:** \_\_\_\_\_ **End Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Key Points/Other Observations/Issues:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Background**

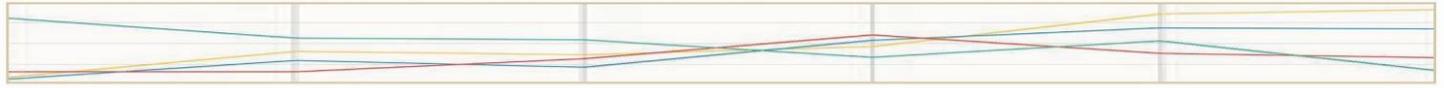
*We'd like to learn a bit more about you and your role in this program.*

1. What is your role at [Graham SLAM/Bronx Academy/MAP]?
  - a. How long have you been in your current position?
  - b. How did you get involved with this program?

### **Case study**

*Now we'd like to learn more about the [Graham SLAM/Bronx Academy/MAP] program.*

1. What are the main goals of [Graham SLAM/Bronx Academy/MAP]?
  - a. Were any changes (additions/deleted/modifications) made to the original goals and objectives?
2. How does the program recruit young people to participate?
  - a. Who does the outreach?
  - b. What do you find effective about the outreach process?
  - c. What challenges do you encounter with outreach?
  - d. How do you try to address those challenges?
3. Please walk me through how a young person gets involved in the [Graham SLAM/Bronx Academy/MAP] program.
  - a. What happens when the young person walks through the door?
  - b. How do you assess a young person's needs to decide which services the young person will receive?
  - c. If a young person is receiving more than one service, how do staff collaborate?
  - a. What strategies does the program use to retain young people?
    - i. What does the follow-up after their first session look like?
    - ii. How are young people incentivized to attend the program?



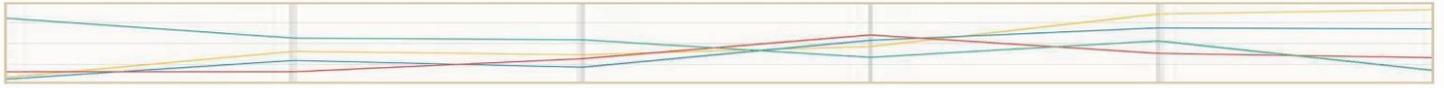
## **Program Implementation**

4. *[Show their logic model or the one we created] Now we'd like to go through the logic model for the program and learn more about the different components and what you would change, if anything, knowing what you know now.*
  - a. Let's start with resources and supports.
    - i. Are there additional supports that the program has been utilizing that are not listed?
      1. Which supports has the program not utilized?
    - ii. Has the program hired all of the coaches and specialists?
      1. How does the program recruit staff?
      2. How are coaches/specialists selected?
      3. What are some challenges in finding staff?
      4. What are some challenges in retaining staff?
      5. How are staff trained?
      6. What are some challenges in training staff?
  - b. Let's move on to activities. We know that sometimes programs change their operations once they start delivering services.
    - i. Have any aspects of the program changed since the original design/proposal?
      1. Please describe the changes made, if any, to the:
        - a. Coaching /individualized case management model.
        - b. Academic programming.
        - c. Career programming.
        - d. Supportive services (i.e., housing, mental health counseling, financial literacy/assistance).
      2. Why was it necessary to make these changes?
      3. Has the program been able to provide or arrange for all of the services envisioned? Why or why not?
        - a. Are as many youth people participating as you had hoped?
    - ii. What services are delivered on site?
    - iii. What services are delivered by referrals to other providers?
    - iv. Which services are delivered on a fixed schedule?
      1. Are young people required to attend a certain number of sessions for any of the services you offer?
    - v. Which services are available at any time youth come to the program?

## **Program Strengths and Challenges**

*Now we'd like to learn more about the program's strengths and challenges.*

5. What are you most proud of so far?
  - a. What factors contributed to program success?
6. What are some of the challenges you face implementing this program?
  - a. Delivering services?
  - b. Working with external actors?
  - c. Working with internal actors?
  - d. How have you addressed these challenges?
7. Are there additional areas of assistance or resources you think could help you succeed?



**Recommendations**

- 8. What recommendations do you have for ACS or other city agencies to make the program better?
- 9. What advice would you give to agencies implementing similar programs?
  - a. Any words of caution?

**Closing**

- 10. Is there anything else you'd like to share that may be important for us to understand about the program?
- 11. Do you have any questions for us?
- 12. If we find we left something out, is it okay for us to follow up with you by phone or email?

*Thank you so much for talking with us today.*



Appendix F: Frontline staff interview instrument

## CJII Frontline Staff Interview Guide YEAR 1

**Introduction:** *Thanks so much for taking the time to talk with us today! I'm [name] and this is [name]. We work at Action Research, which is an independent research organization that provides data analysis and evaluation to improve human services for children, youth, and their families.*

*As you may know, we are partnering with the ISLG (CUNY Institute for Local and State Governance) and DANY (NY County District Attorney's Office) to learn more about how to improve the life trajectories and well-being of youth transitioning out of foster care and into adulthood. Our purpose is to gather information to understand what works for this group of young people and to learn about the challenges of program implementation. We are inviting staff to participate in the study who work regularly with the program participants. Questions will focus on your work at [Graham SLAM/Bronx Academy/MAP]. This discussion should last about an hour. This is an informal discussion, so please feel free to add in things we do not cover.*

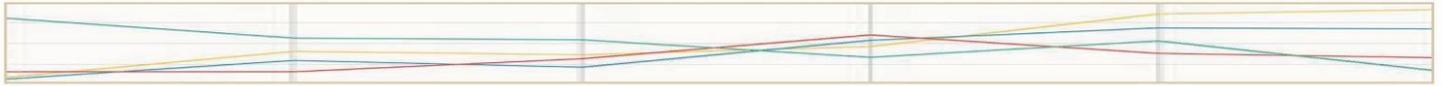
**Consent:** *Your participation in this discussion is voluntary and if you decide to participate, you may skip questions or stop the interview at any time. If at any time you need clarification or do not wish to answer a question, please let me know. All information provided during this conversation will be kept confidential; only Action Research staff will have access to the interview notes and transcripts. If we use quotes in reports to illustrate a point, we will ask you before doing so and confirm the quote. Names will not be attached to quotes.*

*We will be writing down or typing what you say during the interview or, if you agree, we will audio record what you say. The Action Research team will be the only ones who will listen to the recordings, only to catch anything missed during the notetaking. Like the notes, the audio recordings will also be kept anonymous and confidential.*

*[At this time, give participant two copies of the informed consent form and provide them time to go through it in as much detail as they want and have them sign the form when ready.]*

*Thanks again for sharing your time and your thoughts. Before we get started, do you have any questions for us? Just to confirm with you, do we have your permission to record this discussion?*

*[Wait until you receive a verbal YES and both copies the participant's signed consent form agreeing to record the interview. Interviewer should also sign both copies and return one copy to participants for their records.]*



**Participant Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Program** (circle one): Graham SLAM / Bronx Academy / MAP **Role:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Best way to contact you to confirm a quote, if necessary:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewer Name(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Start Time:** \_\_\_\_\_ **End Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Key Points/Other Observations/Issues:**

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### **Background**

*We'd like to learn a bit more about you and your role in this program.*

2. What is your role at [Graham SLAM/Bronx Academy/MAP]?
  - a. How long have you been in your current position?
  - b. How did you get involved with this program?

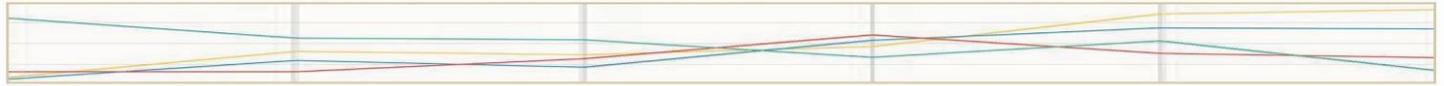
### **Training**

3. Can you tell me about the training you received to prepare you for this position?
  - a. How prepared did you feel to coach/case manage/supervise?
  - b. What were the strengths of the training you received?
  - c. How would you improve the training?

### **Program strategy**

*Now we'd like to learn more about the [Graham SLAM/Bronx Academy/MAP] program.*

4. What are the main goals of [Graham SLAM/Bronx Academy/MAP]?
5. How does the program recruit young people to participate?
  - a. Who does the outreach?
  - b. What do you find effective about the outreach process?
  - c. What challenges does the program encounter with outreach?
  - d. How does the program try to address those challenges?
6. Please walk me through how a young person gets involved in the [Graham SLAM/Bronx Academy/MAP] program.
  - a. What happens when the young person walks through the door?
  - b. How does the program assess a young person's needs and goals?
7. *[If staff is a coach/specialist]* Please walk me through a typical coaching/individual case management session.



- a. How do you engage young people during coaching/individual case management sessions?
- b. Which topics have young people been interested in most during the coaching/individual case management sessions?
- c. After the first session, what are the next steps in developing a plan with the youth?
- d. What strategies does the program use to retain young people?
  - i. Does the program offer incentives for young people to attend?
    - ii. If so, what? If not, why not?
- e. What are some best practices for running a coaching/individualized case management session?
- f. How many young people do you coach/case manage?
8. [*Graham only: If staff is a case planner*] Please walk me through a typical case planning session.
  - a. How do you engage young people during a case planning session?
  - b. What are the main topics you cover in your case planning sessions?
  - c. How do you work with the Graham SLAM coaches?
9. What strategies does the program use to retain young people?
  - a. Does the program offer incentives for young people to attend?
    - i. If so, what? If not, why not?
  - b. What is your caseload?

### **Program Implementation/Adaptations**

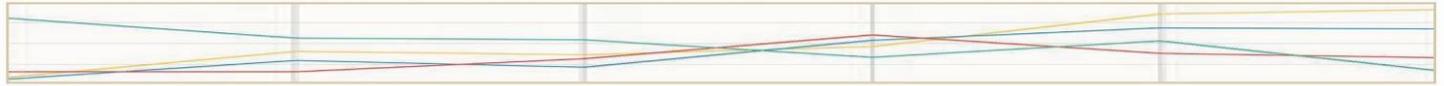
*We know that sometimes programs adapt and change as they are implemented.*

10. What aspects of the program have changed since you started working here?
  - a. Please describe the changes the program made.
  - b. Why was it necessary to make these changes?
  - c. Has the program been able to provide or arrange for all the services envisioned? Why or why not?
11. How do coaches/case managers collaborate with other staff (specialists, case planners, program managers) at the agency?
  - a. If a young person receives more than one type of service, how do coaches/case managers communicate progress and issues across services?
  - b. What are the most valuable supports you have received from your colleagues?
  - c. Are there areas where you think staff could benefit from more support?
  - d. How do coaches/case managers collaborate with staff from other agencies?

### **Program Strengths and Challenges**

*Now we'd like to learn more about the program's strengths and challenges.*

12. What are you most proud of?
  - a. What about this accomplishment makes you proud?
  - b. How could that kind of success happen more often?
  - c. What factors contributed to program success?
13. What are the three biggest challenges in implementing the program?
  - a. Recruitment?
  - b. Staffing?
  - c. Availability of services?



- d. Youth engagement?
  - e. Physical space issues?
  - f. Working with other agencies?
14. Please tell me about a challenging time you had during a coaching/individualized case management session.
- a. How did you address these challenge(s)?
  - b. Are there additional areas of assistance or resources that could have helped you succeed?

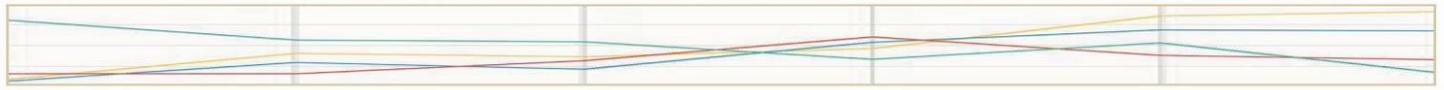
**Recommendations**

15. What recommendations do you have to make the program better?
- a. If you were able to make changes, what would you change?
16. What advice would you give to agencies implementing similar programs?
- a. Any words of caution?

**Closing**

17. Is there anything else you'd like to share that may be important for us to understand about the program?
18. Do you have any questions for us?

*Thank you so much for talking with us today.*



## Appendix G: Analytical Approach for Year 1 and Year 2 Staff Interviews

### *Developing a Codebook and Coding*

To analyze our Year 1 and 2 qualitative data, we developed a codebook of themes and sub-themes on topics that included staff training, participant recruitment and retention, intake procedures, collaboration with other agencies, participant outcomes, challenges, and recommendations. After reaching a consensus on the meaning of each theme, two researchers coded the interviews line-by-line with the finalized codebook. To assess the reliability of coding, the research team coded five overlapping interviews of multiple participant types; there was high agreement on themes across the interviewers.

For Year 2 staff interviews, we reused the Year 1 codebook where appropriate and added new codes related to both COVID-19 impacts on programs and youth as well as recommendations made by program staff based on their second year of programs' implementation. The researchers coded four overlapping interviews of multiple participant types to assess inter-rater reliability and found high agreement across interviews.

After coding all transcripts, two researchers developed a data display to organize notable quotes captured in each code. Researchers analyzed the highlights, challenges, and recommendations that emerged from each theme to understand how program staff viewed program implementation and services delivered.

### *Quarterly Check-In Meeting with Grantees*

Action Research attended quarterly check-in meetings along with ISLG, DANY, and the agency providers to update our knowledge of ongoing program implementations, challenges providers experienced, and strategies that they developed to address these challenges and issues to better serve youths. These meetings provided further understanding of how programs were organized, and how program staff interacted with FYTA in their daily work environment.