Los Angeles-Based Program Develops Five-Year Business Plan to Enhance Services for Children in Foster Care

Enhancing and expanding support and direct services to youth in Los Angeles County foster care

SUMMARY

The Rowell Foster Childrens’ Positive Plan (RFCPP) (as the Rowell Foster Children Fund is now called) developed a five-year business operating plan to structure its growth and expansion. RFCPP is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to enhance the services provided to foster children in Los Angeles County.

Key Results

During the grant period, RFCPP:

- Developed and implemented a five-year business plan with four strategic goals.
- Created mission and vision statements.
- Added experienced board and staff members and formalized legal and financial processes.

Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supported the project with a $29,400 unsolicited grant from November 15, 2004, through December 31, 2005.

THE PROBLEM

More than 40,000 children are in foster care in Los Angeles County, the largest population of foster children in any United States county. These children face an array of obstacles that prevent them from leading healthy and productive lives. By the time they leave foster care, half of them will have dropped out of high school, 45 percent will be unemployed, and 33 percent will have been arrested.
RFCPP, founded in 1990 by actress Victoria Rowell, a former foster child herself, sponsors the participation of foster children in programs that offer fine arts, athletics, summer camps and jobs. The organization serves about 100 children in Los Angeles and in Cambridge, Mass., where it was launched.

Although many Hollywood celebrities lent their names and donated to RFCPP, the organization struggled to develop and maintain an effective structure to guide its activities. As a result, the board was not as actively involved, staff roles and skills were not appropriately defined or aligned, and there was no clear strategy to attain the vision for service delivery enhancement and expansion.

**CONTEXT**

RWJF has been peripherally interested in foster care and child welfare since the mid-1980s. Projects RWJF has supported, on which there are Program Results Reports include:

- **Training Family Court Staff in Child Health and Development.** New York State’s Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children developed and implemented a pilot training project in the Bronx Family Court system called Babies Can’t Wait, to better identify, document and track infants in family court and provide for their special health and developmental needs.

- **Preparation of Managed Care Guidebooks for Caseworkers and Foster Parents.** Project staff produced *Making Managed Health Care Work for Kids in Foster Care: A Guide to Purchasing Services*, designed to help purchasers of managed health care understand the complex health care and social needs of children in foster care.


- **Peer-Support Program for Custodial Grandparents of At-Risk Children.** Grandparents as Second Parents (GASP) organized seven grandparent caregiver conferences in Chicago, Columbus, Ohio; Denver; and four cities in Florida (Bartow, Miami, Tampa and St. Petersburg). Overall, GASP estimated it provided information and/or training to more than 1,100 grandparents, caregivers, providers and community advocates.

**THE PROJECT**

RFCPP hired an independent contractor to prepare a business operating plan. The planning process included:

- Reviewing RFCPP’s operations.
• Interviewing 16 people (staff, executive leadership and foster parents).
• Conducting a one-day strategic planning retreat with 16 people (board and staff members and selected representatives of the foster care community).

RESULTS

The project resulted in a detailed, five-year operational plan, which was approved by the board in December 2005. The plan identified four strategic goals and 43 supporting activities, along with responsible individuals and target completion dates. The goals were to:

• Foster organizational leadership. Among the seven supporting activities:
  — Expand and train the board.
  — Hire appropriately skilled staff.

• Meet legal and technical requirements. Among the 17 activities:
  — File legal paperwork.
  — Create operating policies and an annual budget.

• Conduct organizational development. Among the eight activities:
  — Generate fund-raising plans.
  — Create promotional materials.

• Expand services and service areas. Among the 11 activities:
  — Define a process to assess service needs.
  — Establish a process to identify regions for expansion.

Activities completed during the grant period include:

• Creating mission and vision statements.
• Adding seven new board members with business, nonprofit, educational and foster care expertise.
• Hiring three new staff members.
• Formalizing legal and financial processes.
AFTERWARD

RFCPP continues to implement the business plan, and is largely meeting its target completion dates. The consultant who prepared the plan became the permanent executive director in September 2006.

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