

PropelNext In Action

Unity Care

Over half of all foster youth become homeless, incarcerated, pregnant, or experience substance abuse or severe mental health challenges within two years of leaving foster care. Due to the deepening housing crisis in the San Francisco Bay area, former foster youth in that region are dealing with unprecedented rates of homelessness.

Unity Care is a community-based, nonprofit, multi-service agency for foster youth. Unity Care's goal is to provide safe, stable, and affordable housing for youth as they age out of foster care and to provide them with the supportive services they need for self-sufficiency. The organization aims to create a home-like environment where foster youth and their families feel protected and where they access an array of resources.

Unity Care founder and chief executive officer André Chapman said his personal experience has shaped his vision for the agency.

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“My mother became a foster parent shortly after I left for college. Through the eyes of my new little sister, I learned of the many challenges foster children face growing up in the system.” Chapman said. “I was shocked to learn how many times a child in foster care moves from home to home and school to school. Kids who grow up in foster care – by no choice of their own – often end up in very unstable environments.”



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"Any foster child that moves 10, 15, 20 times during their teen years is going to experience high levels of emotional trauma, mistrusting of adults, and behavioral challenges," Chapman continued. "By the time a foster youth reaches 18 years of age, they typically don't have the life skills and stable family units of support to successfully live on their own, so we fill that gap by providing a level of care and support."

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With the help of PropelNext, Unity Care is becoming a more data-driven organization to deepen and expand its services. With a greater level of sophistication in collecting and evaluating data, Unity Care is developing the systems necessary to provide timely data that demonstrate effectiveness and ensure a system of quality control within its programs.

According to Chapman, "PropelNext has come along at the perfect time for the organization because we have been very focused on what truly drives our decision-making, our thought process, our program design. What the data says has been a place where we've struggled because of all the different systems and

government requirements we're working within that are designed around billable services and outputs, rather than outcomes."

Unity Care is also going through a critical transition period, shifting many of its non-core services to another community-based organization they've developed a strategic partnership with.

"PropelNext is making us think differently about the questions we should be asking – 'How can we do this better?' 'How do we make this program a greater benefit for our kids?' We made the tough decision to spin off those community-based programs so we could focus our energies on ensuring every foster youth we serve has a safe and affordable place to call home," Chapman said.

Through PropelNext, Unity Care is focusing on its transition-age youth (TAY) program, its largest transitional housing program that on any given day serves over 100 transition-age youth across the Bay area.

"Unity Care is singularly focused on our transitional housing initiative and TAY kids. We're back to why I started the organization some 25+ years ago, back to what we're good at," Chapman said.

PropelNext is a program of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation that helps promising nonprofits convert their passion for serving disadvantaged youth into data-driven insights and practices that increase their impact on young people's lives. This is a look into Unity Care, a PropelNext grantee in their Northern California 2021 cohort, and the organization's experience thus far in the program. The Heising-Simons Foundation is the co-investor for Unity Care.