

PropelNext In Action

CYC Focuses on Fidelity to Fight Dropout Rates in Colorado

When Colorado Youth for a Change (CYC) received its invitation to apply for PropelNext, the organization was young and eager to seize every chance to grow its dropout prevention programs. CYC's Early Educational Intervention Program offers an example. Ninth grade is a critical year; one core course failure in the ninth grade decreases one's chance of graduating by 20 percent, so CYC staff work with students and school staff to get students the support they need to pass their classes and move to 10th grade on time.

Over time, the educational intervention program had become a victim of its own success and schools began asking for similar supports during every year of high school.

“PropelNext was a miracle the universe handed us.”

***- Mary Zanotti
Executive Director,
Colorado Youth for a Change***

But CYC staff needed to understand if they were in a position to help students in all grades. Using data from the



propelnext

an initiative of the
Edna McConnell Clark Foundation

program, staff were able to answer the question, "is it working?" They recognized that a program designed for ninth graders was not as effective for eleventh or twelfth graders. They refocused the program on its original intent, serving ninth graders. Today 86 to 88 percent of those ninth graders are graduating high school on time.

"When the PropelNext consultants asked us this question, it was transformative. It focused us; we turned down opportunities that weren't right for us and wound up shrinking some of our programs," said Zanotti. But the shrinkage didn't last long.

"We were approached because we have a reputation for understanding what it means to run an evidence-based model with fidelity. That never would have happened four years ago."

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Zanotti had had her eye on AmeriCorps for years as a way to expand programs. She worked her way through the yearlong grant application process and was awarded a three-year grant totaling approximately \$1 million in 2015 to serve an additional 400 students. This year, with 28 AmeriCorps members, Zanotti expects to reach an additional 600 students.

Through PropelNext CYC gained the skills to use data for learning and improvement and to maintain program fidelity, making it possible to provide consistent, high-quality services, even as the organization grows and adds locations.

CYC is just beginning to reap the impact of their new learning and improvement. Zanotti was recently approached to acquire an additional AmeriCorps program, an evidence-based model for early dropout prevention that supports reading proficiency for 1200 students in kindergarten through third grade. Research shows that students who aren't reading at grade level in third grade are most likely to drop out, so this new program will help CYC advance its goal of solving Colorado's dropout crisis at a much earlier stage in a student's life.

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IMPACTS

86-88%

OF PROGRAM
PARTICIPANTS ARE
GRADUATING HIGH
SCHOOL ON TIME

CYC RECEIVED THREE-
YEAR AMERICORPS
GRANT TOTALING

\$1 million

COLORADO YOUTH FOR A CHANGE
National 2015 Cohort
youthforachange.org