

A HOME WITHIN–CASA THERAPY PROJECT



NEED

Children and young adults who have been removed from their homes and placed in foster care have experienced significant trauma. Once in the system, they are often exposed to additional relationship disruption and loss. Recent studies show that rates of mental health diagnosis among foster youth are as high as 70%, and yet fewer than one out of four foster youth with a known mental health issue receive appropriate treatment. Left unaddressed, childhood trauma and mental health needs contribute to significant challenges in adulthood.



APPROACH

The A Home Within–CASA Therapy Project provides current and former foster youth precisely the type of highly personalized, stable, and committed relationship that, according to the Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, is the “single most common factor for children who develop resilience.”

Volunteer psychotherapists provide free, weekly, one-on-one therapy sessions while Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) provide one-to-one mentorship and engage with the courts, social workers, and other service providers.

Volunteers are welcomed into A Home Within’s nationwide network of professionals and supported with regular group and individual clinical consultations as well as free access to continuing education trainings that directly address issues likely to arise in their work with participating youth.

Since launching in 2020, the A Home Within–CASA Therapy Project has matched nearly 100 current and former foster youth with dedicated volunteer therapists. The goal of the Project is to serve at least 200 California youth per year.



PARTNERS

A national organization based in California, A Home Within matches current and former foster youth with licensed clinicians who provide free, one-on-one, long-term therapy. CASA is a proven model of mentorship and advocacy that improves outcomes for foster youth. The Project draws upon AHW's expertise in engaging clinicians, matching them to clients' needs, supporting quality practice, and conducting outcomes evaluation. The Project relies upon CASA's expertise in volunteer recruitment, and its embedded relationships with child welfare agencies, giving it access to thousands of foster youth statewide.



BACKGROUND

In 2020, Kaiser Permanente and Impact 100 underwrote a pilot launch of the A Home Within-CASA Therapy Project.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the Project served dozens of youth from throughout California while building staff and program infrastructure. In 2021, Kaiser invested again at a significantly higher level and the State of California made a three-year funding commitment that provides a foundation for the Project's continued growth and success.



EVALUATION

Since 2001, the Foster Care Research Group at the University of San Francisco, led by Dr. Saralyn Ruff, has measured treatment outcomes among A Home Within clients. Findings include a significant reduction of mental health symptoms including anxiety, depression, and dissociative states among participating youth. Building on this research and thanks to the generous support of a local family foundation, A Home Within is greatly expanding its program evaluation. In 2021, Dr. Ruff and Dr. Deanna Linville of the University of Oregon are simultaneously conducting both a longitudinal study of outcomes among A Home Within youth and a community-based participatory action research process in preparation for a randomized controlled trial to be implemented beginning in 2022.



DEMOGRAPHICS

The Project's current group of foster youth clients is 33% Black, 26% Latinx, 26% Caucasian, and 15% Mixed Race, while the current group of therapists is 38% Caucasian, 29% Black, 19% Latinx, and 14% Mixed Race. This compares to the general population of psychologists in the U.S., which, as of 2018, was approximately 84% Caucasian, 4% Asian, 6% Latinx, 4% Black, and 1% Other.



COST EFFECTIVENESS

Project volunteers commit to providing free, open-ended, one-to-one therapy. At current market rates, the value of the service is close to \$10,000 per match, per year. With our goal of serving 200 youth per year, we expect the total value of the service to be \$2 million per year. Our total program budget is just over \$400,000 making the expected return on investment at least 5:1.



FUTURE

The long-term goal of the Project is to replicate the model by partnering with other CASA organizations across California and other states. Nationwide, there are over 900 local CASA programs. With adequate support, the project can grow to serve thousands of current and former foster youth, providing them with the long-term, relationship-based support that can help heal trauma, build resilience, and establish a healthy, happy life.