

Reclaiming Futures, Rebuilding Lives

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Over nearly seven decades of investment in North Carolina communities, the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust has learned that although direct service grantmaking can yield immediate results, it often cannot address the underlying causes of poverty or make a lasting impact. To better address these challenges, the Trust has shifted the focus of much of its grantmaking to efforts designed to change the systems serving these populations. The Trust also understands that the impact of its investments increases exponentially when public and private funders and stakeholders—in partnership with the communities they serve—address challenges at the source. In many cases this means finding a systems-based solution. One example of this approach is the Trust's investment in Reclaiming Futures, an initiative to help youth in the juvenile justice system with substance abuse and mental health challenges access much-needed support and resources.

THE CHALLENGE

Every year, an estimated two million children and teens are arrested; a majority of these young people suffer from substance abuse, mental health issues, or both. According to a 2010 report by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, four out of five children and teens in the juvenile justice system are under the influence of alcohol or drugs while committing crimes, but

only 10 percent of youth with substance abuse disorders receive treatment. Meanwhile, two-thirds of juvenile detention facilities house youth awaiting mental health treatment. In North Carolina, an average of 23 percent of youth screened upon entering the juvenile justice system display moderate to high need for substance abuse treatment.

Reclaiming Futures recognizes that these young people are in need of treatment and support, which in turn reduce recidivism, conserve resources, and build safer communities. The initiative also recognizes that in many cases the systems serving youth lack coordination, hindering attempts to put young people on the path to a more responsible and constructive future.

THE RECLAIMING FUTURES MODEL

Reclaiming Futures was originally piloted by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in 2001 in 10 communities across the United States. It is designed to improve treatment services for mental health and substance abuse, provide a comprehensive system of care that coordinates available services, and involve the community in creating new opportunities for youth when reintroduced to the community.

Developing local leadership is a cornerstone of this work. At each Reclaiming Futures site, a team of local leaders supports the initiative. Each team includes five leaders—judges, juvenile justice staff, adolescent substance abuse treatment providers, community members, and a project director who keeps the model on track. All five work as peers and participate in the Reclaiming Futures Fellowship, a national leadership program.

Reclaiming Futures follows youth through the juvenile justice system and coordinates necessary services. The model is broken into six steps, with process and outcome measures attached to each step to gauge progress.

INVESTING IN PHASES

The Trust first learned about Reclaiming Futures in 2007. In 2008 the initiative was introduced in North Carolina at six sites. The Trust initially invested \$45,000 per year per site, but has since discovered that an annual commitment of up to \$70,000 is needed at new sites to launch the program.

To provide oversight, the Trust established a State Champions advisory group. State Champions include the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and

SIX STEPS OF THE RECLAIMING FUTURES MODEL

- 1) Initial Screening
- 2) Initial Assessment
- 3) Service Coordination
- 4) Initiation
- 5) Engagement
- 6) Transition

For more information, visit www.reclaimingfutures.org.

Substance Abuse Services; Division of Medical Assistance; Administrative Office of the Courts; Wake Forest School of Medicine; University of North Carolina at Greensboro; and the Reclaiming Futures National Program Office, as well as other funding partners.

The idea of a state office to better support and coordinate the needs of each site emerged from the State Champions in 2010. In 2011 North Carolina established the nation's first statewide Reclaiming Futures office, which is housed in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety's Division of Juvenile Justice. It is supported by a public-private partnership of the Department of Public Safety, Governor's Crime Commission, and the Trust.

The state office supports the implementation and diffusion of Reclaiming Futures throughout North Carolina by providing training, coaching, and technical assistance; generating interest in additional communities; assisting funders in selecting communities for investment; working toward a common data system to track performance; and identifying challenges and opportunities for policy change.

BENEFITS OF EVALUATION

The Trust contracted with Doug Easterling and Elizabeth Mayfield Arnold at Wake Forest University to evaluate the initiative's progress. Among the key findings of the first-round evaluation:

- The first six Reclaiming Futures sites in North Carolina showed progress in improving the process through which youth in the juvenile justice system are screened, assessed, and referred to substance abuse services.
- The earliest improvements involved more consistent and rigorous screening.
- All sites have built stronger links between court services and treatment providers, increasing rates of assessment, and moving youth into and through treatment.

Critically important among the evaluators' findings is the institutionalization of the Global Appraisal of Individual Needs–Short Screener (GAIN-SS). The five-minute screening tool quickly and accurately identifies youth with substance abuse and/or mental health challenges, and those who might benefit from further assessment or referral. GAIN-SS can also be used to measure behavioral health over time. Thanks to Reclaiming Futures, the screening has been institutionalized within North Carolina's juvenile courts system.

The evaluation has had additional benefits. During the evaluation, Dr. Easterling distilled 12 targets, including coordination, community engagement, and quality management, to determine Reclaiming Futures' impact on systems change. The national Reclaiming Futures office at Portland State University has used the targets to further refine the Reclaiming Futures model.

The evaluation also reinforces a central tenet of the model—without cooperative local leadership, ongoing success at each site is uncertain. Judges, probation officers, substance abuse treatment professionals, and community members must work together to help young people in the justice system.

TIMELINE:

RECLAIMING FUTURES NORTH CAROLINA

- 2007: The Trust investigates Reclaiming Futures and brings it to North Carolina.
- 2008: State Champions group forms.
- 2008: Six sites (four single-county, two multi-county) receive two-year grants.
- 2008: The Trust contracts with Wake Forest University to evaluate investments.
- 2010: The Trust funds two-year extensions for each site.
- 2011: The first-ever statewide Reclaiming Futures office is established.
- 2012: Six new sites identified and funded (four by The Duke Endowment, two by the Trust).
- 2013: Reclaiming Futures is launched at new sites.
 - State office provides guidance, coaching, and new data system.
 - Two additional sites commit to Reclaiming Futures model.
- 2014: Reclaiming Futures operating in 29 counties.

MOVING FORWARD: IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

In addition to the evaluation underway, the Trust's ongoing experience with Reclaiming Futures has identified areas for improvement in the North Carolina systems serving youth.

The lack of consistent data on youth entering the system hinders meaningful evaluation or tracking of Reclaiming Futures' impact regarding recidivism and other metrics. Addressing the shortage of information will become a focus for the Trust's future investments.

The Trust's investments in Reclaiming Futures are ongoing, but by bringing together public and private funders, key stakeholders, state agencies, and community leaders, the Trust has begun to create a sustainable and comprehensive system of care for youth in North Carolina's juvenile justice system. In the future, the Trust hopes to see improvements in treatment services for children and teens suffering from mental health issues and substance abuse.

The Trust recognizes that it cannot make meaningful and positive change in the lives of North Carolina's neediest families and individuals without first challenging the state's established systems of service and care for these populations. By bringing Reclaiming Futures to North Carolina, and bolstering the initiative by institutionalizing it at the state level, the Trust hopes to transform the way North Carolina engages its youth and communities and find solutions to the state's most pressing problems.

VIEWS FROM THE FIELD is offered by GIH as a forum for health grantmakers to share insights and experiences. If you are interested in participating, please contact Osula Rushing at 202.452.8331 or orushing@gih.org.