



SOUTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PARENTS

Stakeholder Interview Report

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MAY 2020

This publication was supported by Grant Number SP1AH000077 from the HHS Office of Population Affairs. Contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not represent the official views of the Department of Health and Human Services or the Office of Population Affairs.

Background and Purpose

The Community Support for Young Parents (CSYP) program, supported by funding from the Pregnancy Assistance Fund through the Office of Population Affairs (OPA) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, aims to support young pregnant women and young parents in South Carolina. The 2018-2020 CSYP program had four primary goals:

1. Improve health outcomes of expectant and parenting teens and young adults.
2. Improve the well-being of children of teens and young adults.
3. Improve the economic self-sufficiency of expectant and parenting teens and young adults.
4. Increase coordination among community organizations serving expectant and parenting teens and young adults, and their children.

The CSYP program is directed by a state leadership team that includes the Children's Trust of South Carolina (CTSC), Fact Forward, the SC Center for Fathers and Families (the Center), the Rural and Minority Health Research Center (RMHRC), and the Core for Applied Research and Evaluation (CARE). The state leadership team provides coordination, support, and oversight to local grantees. Six SC communities are funded:

- Darlington County: Darlington County First Steps and Man 2 Man
- Richland County: Prisma Healthy Start and Midlands Fatherhood Coalition
- Spartanburg County: Mary Black Foundation and Upstate Fatherhood Coalition
- Horry County: A Father's Place and Family Outreach of Horry County
- Anderson County: Upstate Fatherhood Coalition
- Florence County: Man 2 Man

To understand implementation of the Community Supports for Young Parents (CSYP) program, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted. The overall purpose of the interviews was to further document program implementation. Interviews focused on capturing successes and challenges related to program implementation, as well as perspectives on partner engagement, effective strategies for implementation, and the implementation context. This implementation evaluation aimed to answer four key questions:

1. Do local sites have adequate support and guidance from the state leads to implement their program as they move through the development and implementation processes of their programs?
2. What ongoing successes, challenges, and lessons learned do sites experience as part of their program implementation process?
3. How are lessons learned from previous years/funding cycles used to inform implementation of CYSP into new sites?
4. What factors promote or inhibit sustainability of CYSP?

Methods

A series of key stakeholder interviews were conducted to gather a broad and diverse range of perspectives. Interviews were conducted with state and local level representatives who have

had an integral role in implementation. Participants were recruited for in-depth interviews during February and March 2020 using maximum variation and snowball sampling techniques. Participants represented perspectives from the Children’s Trust of South Carolina, Fact Forward, the SC Center for Fathers and Families, and selected representatives from local implementing organizations.

A semi-structured interview guide was designed to gather stakeholder’s perceptions of the support and guidance provided for implementation, as well as successful strategies, challenges, and lessons learned during the implementation process. Sample questions included, “*Who are your most engaged community partners for the CSYP program?*” and “*Please tell me about some of the biggest challenges in implementing the CSYP program.*” The complete interview guide is included in the appendices (Appendix 1). A total of 16 key informant interviews were conducted via telephone and recorded (with permission) via a conference line. An inductive approach was used to analyze all data. The inductive approach allows themes to emerge from data rather than using a preconceived conceptual framework. Recordings were transcribed for analysis. A qualitative data analysis software (NVivo v.12) was used to code data and organize the analysis. Analysis of interview transcripts included the development of a code book to outline initial themes and emergent codes. Following the development of codebooks to organize those emergent themes, an additional, more detailed pass of coding was completed with all transcripts and a finalized codebook was developed.

Results

A total of 16 interviews were conducted. Participants were from the state leadership team (n=3), Richland County (n=4), Darlington County (n=3), Spartanburg County (n=3), and Horry County (n=3). The majority of interview participants had been working with their organization and the CSYP program for multiple years; more than half of participants reported working with the CSYP program from start of it in 2013. Interview participants had a variety of roles with their organization and with the CSYP program including executive directors, project directors, family educators, and intervention specialists. Participant responsibilities ranged from supervision, administrative, program development, data input, recruitment, and working directly with parents and families.

Evaluation Question 1: Do local sites have adequate support and guidance from the state leads to implement their program as they move through the development and implementation processes of their programs?

State Leadership Team’s Support is Greatly Valued and a Key Component to the Success of CSYP. Local program directors and staff shared positive feedback on the support provided by the state leadership team. Interviewees emphasized that the state leadership team’s support was extremely valuable to their success in implementing the CSYP program. One participant described support provided by Fact Forward, a key member of the state leadership team, “*We could have never ever have done what we did without the support, expertise, and knowledge*

that we gained from Fact Forward and their staff. They were just key. They supported us tremendously.” Many interviewees also commented that state leadership team members were always helpful, quick to respond, and available whenever they were needed. Another participant explained, *“I feel like [the support] is really effective because the things that they’re bringing forth are eye-openers...ways that we could improve what we’re already doing. And they’re just so helpful and hands-on. And I feel that we can go to them with any problems or any concerns, or anything. I feel like it’s a really good open-door policy.”* Several interviewees also reported being pleased with the support from the USC evaluation team. In addition, the local sites reported they valued the perspective of the state leadership team for helping them come up with new ideas and ways to meet the CSYP program goals. Although the state leadership team was not working directly with the young parents, interview participants from local offices described that they remained mindful of the challenges local offices might face and offered appropriate advice to help them achieve their milestones.

Learning Labs Provide Relevant and Useful Educational Materials.

Interview participants from local networks valued the learning labs provided by the state leadership team because it gave staff the opportunity to learn new information, share ideas, learn from one another, and collaborate. Participants described the educational material to be important, relevant, and applicable. One interviewee explained, *“We’ve enjoyed getting to learn about career development and better ways to serve, best practices, and the resources that are out there for our parents to access.”* Several participants also described the value of having the learning lab sessions face to face rather than over the phone. Another participant said they wish the learning labs could have been all at the beginning of the CSYP program so they would have had the wealth of knowledge before the program was started.

Regular Site Visits from State Leadership Team Allow for Relationship Building, Technical Assistance, and Coaching.

State leadership team members, as well as local program staff, underscored the importance of site visits. These meetings were beneficial to both the state leadership team and local program staff, as it allowed the state leadership team members to get an inside look at the local program operations, and local program staff could share their challenges and successes. Interviewees especially appreciated that the state leadership team members came to them rather than them having to travel to Columbia. In addition, local program staff felt like the site visits allowed for more collaboration and made them feel like *“part of a team”* with the members at the state level. One interviewee also described how the site visits allowed for more open communication between the local partners and the state leadership team: *“I think that it’s also a time where we can bring up maybe tough stuff you know, so it’s not just trying to oh, look how good we are or here’s our numbers. It’s also a time for us to say, “Hey, this has been challenging, or how do we think we could do this better?” So, I’ve personally felt comfortable bringing up tough subjects in the site visit as well.”*

Pulse Surveys Provide Valuable Feedback, But Some Participants Felt They Were Repetitive and Lacked Anonymity.

Interview participants described that the information collected in the pulse surveys was valuable for understanding how the other partnering programs in their community feel about where things are with the CSYP program. Interview participants reported that the information from the pulse surveys was a good indicator as to if project objectives were moving according to plan and if all partners working together are happy. In addition, some noted that the information could be used to look at new ideas and ways of how to meet the goals.

However, several participants described that the repetitive nature of the survey made it an easy 'check box' by just repeating the same answer every time. One interview participant explained, *"I think by being every week, it becomes repetitious because it doesn't give us the opportunity to have a span of something that may have changed over time to have a different opinion about. So, you end up just maybe saying the same things."*¹ In addition, other participants described they didn't feel comfortable saying what they wanted to say because the survey was not anonymous: *"It's obvious that they know who's completing the survey, because if you don't complete it, you get an email saying, you have not completed the survey. So, if I'm completing a survey and they know it's me, then frankly, I would not feel 100 percent comfortable saying exactly what I might want to say."*

Evaluation Question 2: What ongoing successes, challenges, and lessons learned do sites experience as part of their program implementation process?

CSYP Program Successes

Collaboration and Partnership Among Local Partners Plays a Key Role in the Success of the CSYP Program.

Many interview participants noted that a big success of the CSYP program was its ability to bring community partners together. Collaboration among local partners is key to helping expectant and parenting teens attain their goals, as well as to the success of the CSYP program. One interviewee said, *"I think that one of the biggest things -- successes of this program...was the fact that it brought so many community partners together."* Another participant described the importance of meeting often with community partners and coming together to serve as many clients as possible to make sure none fell through the cracks: *"So just really us coming together trying to provide that safety net, as I said, for our young parents was a definite success being able to sort of staff some of our clients and then refer them out to the necessary providers that were at the table with us. You know providing training for different community agencies working with our targeted population. So, it's helped us to increase our capacity as a community to really address the young parents."*

Several participants described how the CSYP program has allowed for a seat at the table for the fatherhood programs. Another interviewee said, *"One of the things that wasn't happening*

¹ Pulse surveys are disseminated on a monthly basis, rather than weekly as this participant recalled.

before the project was any kind of collaboration between fatherhood and motherhood organizations.” Another participant describes the importance of having the motherhood and fatherhood organizations collaborate: “Because we know that certainly there’s strength in that dual parent involvement in the child’s life. And even though maybe the relationship between Mom and Dad isn’t intact in that traditional way, how can they each invest in the child?”

Partnerships with educational programs and schools have created opportunities to assist young parents in furthering their education. For some, this may look like obtaining their GEDs; for others, it may include enrolling in post-secondary education. In addition, being able to work closely with and in schools builds a support system that is invaluable to teen parents. Collaboration with educational programs and certificate programs has helped clients become employable. For example, one interviewee discussed how they work with a local technical school to get clients into a forklift operator certificate program. Additionally, their partnership with the local technical school has created opportunity for enrollment fees to be waived for their clients.

Partnerships with state workforce development offices (e.g. SC Works) are also providing valuable opportunities to help young parents get back to being independent and self-sufficient. Often, young fathers with criminal backgrounds are challenged to find employment. One representative from a local fatherhood coalition explained how they were offering expungement workshops and how this could provide great opportunities for young men. In addition, local fatherhood coalitions are looking for additional ways to collaborate with SC Works to explore more opportunities like this. An interview participant described how this becomes a cycle for young parents: *“For example, you’ve got a 20-year-old young man who is a father of one. He has no transportation. He has things on his background and he may have – may or may not have a child support issue. You see the need. If he does not pay the child support, he has to go before the judge and possibly may have some type of jail time. Where we come in is of course to talk with the judge on asking can we work with the young man instead of having him incarcerated. Let us work with him to help him get the job. Those background factors – again, it makes it difficult or even takes longer to get them to employment.”*

Other partnerships have helped young parents and the success for the CSYP program, as well. For example, one funded community has a partnership with a women’s shelter, where they serve a lot of teen moms living in the shelter. In addition, other partnerships have allowed for unique community events for these populations. One interview participant discussed how they have provided a “summer camp” through sponsoring partners that includes motivational speakers from technical schools or other organizations and a ‘fun’ day at local amusement park. Another participant said they have a Christmas party every year that includes toys for children donated by Toys for Tots.

CSYP Has Raised Awareness About the Barriers Young Parents Face.

Another success described by interview participants was that the CSYP program has helped raise awareness for the young parenting population. One interview participant described, *“So, to me, that’s the biggest success...building this awareness that we also need to bring other*

people into this conversation. We need to embrace our workforce partners at the state level, not just the local level. We need to embrace the technical college system...not just the local level which we've been working at, but also at the state level, in terms of policy impact." In addition, the CSYP program has also helped build awareness for the unique and complex needs of young parents. Parents who are under 18 years old have different needs of parents in their 20's and 30's. The CSYP program has helped local programs understand and be able to cater to the needs of the younger parents they serve. The CSYP program has also paved the way to help break down some of the barriers young fathers face. In addition, it has raised awareness to the many challenges that fatherhood programs face when working with young fathers.

CSYP Program Accomplishments Include Serving More Young Parents, Reducing Repeat Pregnancies, and Increased High School Graduation Rates.

Interview participants described that the CSYP program has allowed for local programs to serve more clients and expand their existing services to younger ages. One interviewee said, *"I think the total number of young people that have been reached with the project is phenomenal... we're going to reach over 1,000 young people just in these two years."* In addition, the program has helped build community capacity to address and recognize the needs of young parents. For example, some communities have been successful in getting additional grants to do more work like this (e.g. Darlington).

Interview participants reported that the CSYP program has created positive outcomes among expectant and parenting teens, which include a reduction in repeat pregnancies among teens. In addition, more expecting and parenting teens are graduating from high school. One participant explained the program's educational successes: *"Overall, we had 93.4 percent graduate over that period of time. And you may already know this, if you get pregnant as an adolescent in South Carolina, only about 40 percent will graduate high school. We're very consistently in the 90s for that percentage, so we have very good luck with their educational goals."* Another interview participant described the success of one of their clients finishing school, *"And so she was really on the verge of being a ten-day drop, which in our district if you're absent for ten consecutive days they essentially drop you. So, she was on the verge of being a ten-day drop, and then her case manager really worked with her on formulating a plan. You know how can we get you back in school? Transportation is an issue; let's look at that. Let's figure out how to get you to school. And I think after that conversation, she really turned around and said, "Okay, I'm having this baby, this is happening." Being accepting of her pregnancy and then going back to school and ending up just really doing well in school toward the end there. She was a senior and so she graduated. Long story short, she ended up graduating on time and she had her baby."*

Young parents served by CSYP have been able to strengthen relationships with their children, as well as build healthy relationships as co-parents. Many of the young men served by CSYP have been able to get back in the lives of their children and form better relationships with the mother(s) of their children. One interviewee described a success story from one of their clients: *"His father had recently committed suicide and he had a great father. He talks highly of his father. His girlfriend got pregnant and he had no idea what to do with his life such a mess. He*

wasn't working, didn't really aspire for anything. He came here. Now the child's been born. He's actively involved in the child's life. He's working two jobs, following his passion of music. Planning on getting enrolled back into school. He's still dealing with the legal trouble, but it's not consuming him anymore. He's decided to take life head on and just - he wants his child to have the wonderful life that he had. He's been able to pull himself out of that dark place to be able to be everything he had for his child who's here now of course. It's still in the process, but just the change that he's made from November to now is just amazing."

Passionate and Educated Staff is Key to CSYP Program Success.

Passionate staff who focus on building relationships with clients was described as an extremely valuable aspect to the success of the CSYP program. Interview participants explained the importance of creating a trusting environment for parenting teens. In addition, they described the value of having dedicated staff members to serve young parents. Because young parents have complex and unique needs, it is very important to have someone to focus on young parents within the team. One interview participant explained, *"I just think the ability to have a person that really just focuses on the teens...that way we can cater to their needs...so, say for instance, [our local shelter]. They call [our team member] all the time and she'll go over...I just think the dynamics of being able to work through a lot of that in a more defined way creates a lot of the successes for us. Because they get to know her and they see her coming in and out. So, therefore the comfort level is there already because the girls may see that she's been there with someone else. So, I just think that creates...a more trusting environment with that individualized person that's focused on that age population."*

In addition, having a dedicated and well-trained staff is key for the success of programs working with young parents. The CSYP program provided great opportunities for staff to receive trainings specific to the needs of young parents. Additionally, the program and trainings allowed for regular meetings among network partners that normally do not occur.

CSYP Program Challenges

Many Barriers that Young Parents Face Focus on the Social Determinants of Health.

Interview participants discussed that parenting teens face many barriers and that gaps remain in communities to adequately address these barriers. Many interviewees talked about how the needs of young parenting populations were embedded in the complex, social determinants of health. Among the issues described, conversation focused on these key social determinants:

- Lack of transportation
- Lack of childcare
- Lack of housing
- Unemployment
- Lack of education around healthy parenting
- Mental health Issues
- Violence (including domestic violence and human trafficking)

Participants remarked on the importance of addressing these issues, recognizing the strong influence they have on the ability to access resources and services, and the connection between the social determinants and health outcomes for parents and their children.

Many interviewees explained that the young parents they serve often lack access to transportation. This makes it challenging for them to get to work, appointments, and monthly meetings among their peers. One interviewee explained how their organization is trying to help with this issue: *"We've also been doing, as incentives, especially if they give birth while they're in our program, we sometimes give them a basket with baby items. But also, we've been giving them Uber cards to use for travel."* Interviewees pointed out that lack of transportation is especially a concern in rural areas: *"Transportation for our county, well probably every county around the state, especially rural counties, is a major challenge and barrier for our young people. That's an ongoing issue. That's the one that stands out to me."*

Several interview participants discussed the need for access to quality, affordable childcare. Although some parents qualify for childcare voucher programs, there is a continued need for access to childcare among young parents. Another interviewee discussed how child care could be used as an incentive for attending classes or trainings for young parents: *"When we talk to the guys about the train to work programs and everything, they want to do something different that they know will improve things down the road. [But], there's a lot of worries...basically there needs to be something like transitional benefits. The one thing that comes up is if I take this job at \$9 an hour, I may lose X amount in food benefits or for this or for that. There needs to be something that could - 'cause it's a real worry and it's the same on the mother's side. The thing that they have, too is a lot of them won't take an opportunity that would put them in a better position later on because of what they will lose now, the benefits and everything. That's something that's a recurring problem. If there was something to fill that gap, whether it was funding for stipends or anything like that or childcare while somebody went to class or went to a training program, things of that to take away those worries and concerns."*

Another significant need among the young parenting population is lack of affordable housing. Interviewees discussed that this was especially a concern for teens because they often get kicked out once their parents find out they are expecting. One CSYP program has partnered with a local women's shelter to find housing for some of their parenting teens. Other times, the teens end up in foster homes. However, interview participants discussed how a formal solution to getting young parents the housing they need should be created.

Unemployment remains a challenge for many young parents. One interviewee, representing Horry County, discussed how their beach towns often have jobs that are not sustainable beyond the summer season, which is especially a concern for their homeless clients: *"They see the seasonal jobs, which is not very advertised here well. Right now, seasonal jobs are coming up. It's great. They're gonna make great money right now. As soon as fall/winter hits, they're back in the same situation. If it would be something that could help them or they can have a sustainable job, that would be great."*

Another barrier that faces young parents is the need to build parenting skills. There is a particular need to focusing on co-parenting, what that looks like, and how to build a healthy co-parenting relationship. One interviewee described the need for co-parenting education or facilitation: *“I guess [we need] some type of mediation sometimes because some girls will say, dad is not present, involved, or anything like that. But I think that’s not the case, it’s because he’s not involved with them, they assume not involved with the baby. And so, I think sometimes some type of prenatal just parenting sessions or something would be kind of beneficial for them because they are young, and it is a big task to co-parent. And you’re taking on an adult-like responsibility.”*

Interview participants described that they often serve young parents who have underlying mental health issues, or a history of domestic violence, abuse, or human trafficking. Several participants described that they have young moms dealing with postpartum depression. One interviewee described one young mother’s experience in overcoming barriers through peer support: *“she had experienced a lot of stuff in her life, including sexual abuse and she -- I remember her making a statement to my project specialist...that coming to the group...for the first time in her life she realized that she wasn't the only one who had these feelings and had suffered this kind of abuse in her life.”* Additionally, fathers often come from backgrounds with criminal records, which presents challenges for obtaining custody or being employed.

There is a Continued Need to Raise Awareness and Address Stigma for Young Fathers.

Several interview participants reported a continued need for raising awareness about the importance of fatherhood. A couple of participants felt as if fatherhood continues to be an afterthought and that many of the services offered for parents are geared towards women and children. A focus on fatherhood remains a crucial piece of the puzzle that still needs attention. One interviewee explained the value of having both parents involved a child’s life, *“A lot of times we’re putting band-aids on issues when it comes to child welfare or everything, housing to trying to build up women and giving them support. I mean, if fathers could just take their rightful place in the lives of their children it would really alleviate a lot of the challenges that single mothers face...people don’t understand how it changes the trajectory of a child’s life just having both parents and how father engagement just changes so many aspects of life for a child in the community. It just reduces so much challenge.”*

Keeping Expecting and Parenting Teens in School Remains A Challenge.

Another barrier that young parents face, especially mothers, is trying to stay in school. Young mothers, especially after they deliver, miss days of school and often end up dropping out. Some explained that schools are not flexible enough to work with these moms to help them stay in school. Several participants discussed working with schools to find ways to keep the moms in school through homebound. One interviewee said, *“I’m not saying give them special treatment, but work with them a little more for a flexible schedule. We give them ABC vouchers, especially for the high school and homeless moms. When they’re in high school and they’re going to school, they can also provide and have affordable childcare during school hours.”*

However, one interviewee described how missing too many weeks of school can lead to the denial of ABC vouchers.

More Comprehensive Supports Are Needed, as Well as More Collaboration Among Programs.

Participants discussed the need for more comprehensive supports for expecting and parenting teens. Being able to go to one place for preventative care, health care, workforce development, parenting counseling, and other resources would make it more accessible for teen parents (especially when transportation is an issue). In addition, interview participants pointed out that there is a need to improve community partner referral networks.

CSYP Program Implementation Challenges

Awareness Surrounding the Needs of Expecting and Parent Teens Is A Challenge for CSYP Implementation.

Several challenges for implementing the CSYP program were discussed by interview participants. The lack of awareness for young parenting populations was described as a key challenge. For example, interview participants pointed out that as adults, we make a lot of assumptions about the needs of teen parents without really knowing or investigating what they think their needs are.

Engaging, Recruiting, And Retaining Young Parents Is Challenging.

Additionally, many interview participants said that recruiting, engaging, and retaining young parents into their programs is one of the biggest challenges. Several interviewees described incidents when they had put in a lot of effort to create an event, workshop, or session for young parents, but that very few or no one attended. In addition, participants expressed that reaching and getting fathers engaged is particularly challenging. One participant explained, “*We also work with fathers of all ages as long as they have a child under the age of 18. It is more difficult to recruit and find them [young dads]. When you do find them, they're a lot more unreliable than the older population. It's a lot of tracking them down, following up. Gotta go through a lot more to get them into the door and then keep them in there. It's just a lot more challenging of a population.*” Because of the young population, fathers often do not live with the mother, so it can be more challenging to recruit and/or reach both parties. Working with a younger population also presents certain legal challenges that are out of the local program or organization’s control.

Unstable Funding and Resources for Expecting and Parenting Teens Remains A Challenge for Implementation.

Many participants expressed the challenge of building a program on a time limited funding schedule. Over time, the CSYP (PAF) funds have been disseminated between one and three years. Participants explained that this short amount of time makes it difficult to create new programs and hire new staff when funding is relatively short term. Some stakeholders suggested that they were hesitant to expand their teams to serve more clients because of funding uncertainties. Instead, they just asked existing staff to do more. Often, existing programs and staff are just expanded and built upon rather than creating new programs or

hiring new staff. Staff transitions, retention and program capacity were also mentioned as challenges related to CSYP program implementation.

Suggestions for Improving the CSYP Program

When participants were asked to reflect on what they might change or do differently if they were to do the CSYP program over again, several suggestions were provided:

- Forming partnerships earlier. Many respondents mentioned that they wished they had collaborated with more partners sooner.
- Greater coordination among programs. Coordination between programs and forming partnerships earlier were mentioned by many participants. The value of partnership, as discussed previously, became an essential piece of maintaining the work.
- Funding for more staff and longer funding periods.
- Serving a larger age range. Participants described how it was difficult only being able to serve young adults because they found there was a high number of 25-year-old fathers that met and had the same needs as those ages 17- 24. One participant suggested going up to age 27 would be helpful.
- Curricular improvements. Several participants mentioned that having the program curriculum include more around self-sufficiency and ways to meet employment goals would have been helpful. Additionally, adding more of the Be Proud, Be Responsible, Be Protected curriculum was suggested for making the parents feel like they have achieved something.
- Providing childcare during monthly program meetings with young parents.

Evaluation Question 3: How are lessons learned from previous years/funding cycles used to inform implementation of CYSP?

Great strides were made in addressing and incorporating lessons learned from prior evaluation work into subsequent years of implementation for the CSYP program. For example, a series of interviews conducted as part of the 2016-2017 CSYP evaluation identified several key lessons learned. An update, based on data collected from current stakeholder interview data, is as follows:

- ***Specific Guidance Is Needed from A State Leadership Team to Guide Local Implementation***

As previously described, local partners were especially complimentary of the support and guidance provided by the state leadership team (see pages 3-4). For example, the state leadership team implemented several new activities to enhance their level of connection and support with local communities, including learning labs and revised site visit structures. The current structure of the state leadership team was informed by prior evaluation feedback. For example, one state team member explained how learning lab sessions were designed to meet needs expressed by local communities: *“We tried to get feedback from them on what they believe they need...that's how we started. So, we tried to implement things that they need, but also – they need to meet the objectives.”*

- ***Holistic Supports to Both Mothers and Fathers is Essential: Partners Should Collaborate to Identify Opportunities for Integration***

Strong collaboration to holistically serve families is key to supporting this population. A participant discussed the importance of the CSYP grant in bringing motherhood and fatherhood programs together—and building intentional collaboration to support parents and their children’s early development. S/he explained: *“The value around embracing young families...whatever their configuration is, and saying ‘how can we help them off to a great start with the obstacles they face? How can we help all of them?’ Because we know that certainly there’s strength in that dual parent involvement in the child’s life. And even though maybe the relationship between Mom and Dad isn’t intact in that traditional way, how can they each invest in the child? But it’s a paradigm, unfortunately, this separation...It’s certainly reinforced by the court and other systems. It’s the way we unfortunately do things... sometimes we create more antagonistic relationships rather than looking for opportunities for there to be co-parenting and collaboration.”*

Accordingly, current data indicates that partnerships in some communities have grown to be more collaborative and enhance supports provided to both mothers and fathers. One local fatherhood representative explained the growth in their collaboration, *“So we’ve established a memorandum where it’s a reversed referral where with the mother that they work with, they send the fathers to us...and then we would refer the women there. We’ve been in great partnership with them.”* However, there is also some room for improvement in other communities. One representative from another program explained their existing efforts to enhance partnerships, *“The need to raise awareness for local programs is an area for continued development. One thing I am in the middle of trying to do - is to really strengthen the relationship with the young mother’s program. There’s a father attached to every one of them. Really just working closer and strengthening that.”*

- ***Authentic and Meaningful Partnerships are Essential***

The importance of community partnerships continues to be an integral component of the CSYP program (see pages 5-6). These partnerships are key in helping parents get the resources and services that they need, as well as in providing referrals into local CSYP programs. One local program leader explained the importance of community partners in helping meet the needs of the entire family unit, *“Many a times, we have participants to the program, male or female, that may have situations and need of housing, may need assistance in heating and cooling or utility assistance. We connect with [our local] Community Action Agency to assist them with that. Healthy Start also helps with the situation— if there’s a – maybe a pre and post natal situation, we connect with them to help out with that. Many times over, it is very good in a sense because it allows us to be able to serve both the mother and the father. While First Steps or PeeDee Healthy Start is assisting the mother, we’re assisting the father and trying to make both ends meet toward the middle.”*

- ***Caring, Dedicated, and Committed Staff Are Critical to The Success of The Program***
The importance of a great team continued to be mentioned as a key program support. Many local program leaders discussed the importance of a strong, passionate team (see page 8). For example, one program leader explained, *“the other thing that I think we do really well here is our case managers are well educated, have been trained well. We offer them a lot of training to keep current. And they really are very caring, smart, passionate young women. I think we’re fortunate to have a team that is really dedicated to doing good work.”*

While progress was made to build on most lessons learned, some were identified as continued challenges:

- ***State Leadership Team Support for Marketing Local Programs is Needed***
Interview data indicates that local programs still need support to raise awareness and market their programs. For example, one local fatherhood program representative described the ongoing need for support in raising awareness of their program, *“Working on getting more community support and more awareness out there. I found it to be true when I was trying to get my life together. I’ve been there before and what I had found is when I started working here, I found out about all kinds of resources that I had no clue about. When I needed the help and looked everywhere to try to find it, it was nowhere to be found, no information out there. Being here in the field and knowing about all these things, I get the struggle. As a nonprofit, you really can’t have a huge marketing budget when services need to be provided. It’s a catch 22 because the people who most need you are the least likely to know about you. Just really working on getting the word out and trying to forge new partnerships.”*
- ***Recruitment Strategies for Pregnant and Parenting Teens Need Development***
Recruitment of young parents is a continued challenge, as described on page 11. Engaging young fathers was described as a challenge, as they are often not engaged in school systems and have to be found in other community settings. One state leadership team described this challenge, even in the face of working to meet people where they are: *“Here’s a good example of being where they are. So, in Newberg², we established a really good relationship with a local technical school. So, we said, “Okay. Well we’ll come on campus, we’ll promote. We’ll set up a table,” but got very little return. You would think, “Hey. Okay, college campus. You’re going to have guys that” – but didn’t get a whole lot of return on that. And we were probably there once a week doing, you know, promotions. So, you know, it’s finding the right hole to fish in. Choosing the best place to recruit...but, communities are different. [In] more rural, it might be a little harder to find folks, you know, versus an urban area where– you know, it’s more-central.”*

Evaluation Question 4: What factors promote or inhibit sustainability of CYSP?

Interview participants felt that lack of funding remained a challenge for sustaining the work of CYSP. Many local organizations are searching for other funding opportunities so they can

² Pseudonym used

maintain their staff and capacity. Participants described that in order to sustain the work of CYP, they would be looking for opportunities for partnership, applying for new funding, and getting local agencies, organizations, and schools to invest in the work (e.g. will the school start supporting the case manager position's salary). One participant explained how they will continue to expand on ways they have been successful in working with parenting teens: *"To continue that, we've done work with – through social media in showing some of the success stories with the fathers that we already have enrolled and engaged. And some of the fathers themselves have gone out and really brought other young fathers that meet the focus scope to the program."*

The state leadership team has made an investment in planning for sustainability and providing local sites with tools, resources, and information. They have provided technical assistance and learning labs specifically designed to promote sustainability. In addition, they have continued to invest time in looking for new funding opportunities to support the work. The state level continues to seek out valuable partnerships and form connections that may help build the work done with expectant and parenting teens in South Carolina.

Conclusions

The CYP program has had its share of successes and challenges, but the support of the state leadership team has been instrumental in driving implementation success. Stakeholders described the importance of their support, technical assistance, and ongoing availability as a key to program success. In addition, the state leadership team's site visits and training sessions ("learning labs") helped to drive success through relationship building, coaching, and regular communication.

Stakeholders reported a range of program successes including growth in local collaboration and partnerships and a greater awareness of the needs of young parents. In addition, stakeholders reported that the CYP funds were instrumental in reaching young parents and providing them with the resources they need to thrive. Some cited success including young parents completing school and reducing repeat pregnancies as evidence of the great impact the program has had. Lastly, but not least, the importance of the passionate and dedicated staff was noted as a key to the success of the CYP program.

Though, challenges persist. Many interview participants explained that the social determinants of health--- and a lack of resources to address them--- prevent young parents from reaching their full potential. For example, lack of transportation, quality affordable childcare, and housing are ongoing challenges for young parents. Other challenges to meeting the needs of young parents include recruiting and engaging them in programs like CYP, the need for more resources, and unstable funds to support this type of work.

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Thank you for your willingness to talk with me today. We are conducting these interviews as part of the Community Supports for Young Parents (CSYP) program evaluation. The purpose of these interviews is to understand your perspectives on CSYP as a key community stakeholder. I'll be asking questions about your experiences with the project including some of its success, challenges, and impacts. If I ask a question that doesn't make sense, let me know and I can try to rephrase it. Or, if there is a question you just can't or don't want to answer, just let me know and we can skip it. We'll be developing a report that summarizes what we hear from participants in these interviews. In that report, we will not identify who said what...only key themes across the interviews. To help us with the report, would you feel comfortable if I recorded this to help with our notes?

*Yes—press *2 on conference line*

No--- OK, I understand. I'll just take notes by hand. Let me know if you'd like anything to be off record. Lastly, do you have any questions for me before we get started?

1. Please tell me about your role with the CSYP program.
Probe: Length of time w/ program?
2. Who are your most engaged community partners for the CSYP program?
3. Please tell me about one of your most memorable client success stories.
4. What other big CSYP program successes would you like to share?
Probe: What contributed to those successes?
5. Please tell me about some of the biggest challenges in implementing the CSYP program.
Probe: What things do you continue to struggle with?
6. How would you describe the support provided by the state leadership team?
Probe: effectiveness, usefulness of TA?
Probe: Did any of these activities make you feel more connected to the state leadership team?
(list learning labs, site visits, pulse surveys)
7. If you could do this all over again, what two things would you change (or not change)?
8. How do you plan to continue the successes of CSYP?
Probe: What worries you most about trying to continue this work?
9. What gaps remain in your community for supporting expectant and parenting teens and young adults?
10. What else do you think I should know about your network or community?