



2018 Impact Report

Overview

youthSpark has always been an innovator in transforming the lives of youth at risk for exploitation and abuse, and a thought-leader in reducing child exploitation and sex trafficking rates in Georgia and across the country. Each day we work to change the lives of abused, exploited, and at-risk youth. Our mission is to advocate for youth who are in need of legal and adult protection in abusive and exploitative situations, and we accomplish our mission through a combination of direct services, data-driven research, policy advocacy, and training for organizational partners. We have honed our scope and influence since our founding in 2000 when juvenile court judges, elected officials, and concerned friends in Atlanta envisioned an independent nonprofit with a concentrated focus on vulnerable children and families affected by the court. Over the years we have offered solutions that make a real and immediate difference for youth, with a special focus on those young people involved in the juvenile justice system.

youthSpark serves at-risk youth through our *Youth Services Center (YSC)*, which launched in the fall of 2016. The YSC is based in the Fulton County Juvenile Court building in downtown Atlanta, but is owned and operated by youthSpark. We offer assessment, comprehensive case management, wraparound services and referrals for youth referred by the Court. Our three main programs are Voices for girls, Connections for boys, and Expressions for LGBTQ youth. We also offer alumni programs and activities for graduates who want to stay involved and use their voice to empower others.

We designed the *Youth Services Center* using the lessons we learned from our research and history of serving vulnerable youth through our initial residential program. We use trauma-informed and evidence-based practices to provide a vital safety net of wrap-around services to youth through a cost-efficient, collaborative services model. Our key objectives for the Center are to 1) increase school attendance, 2) decrease running away, and 3) provide group therapy and court advocacy to put youth on a positive track of personal growth and self-sufficiency. The Center is designed to provide early intervention services to increase youth's wellbeing, health, reduce vulnerabilities, and build relationships with positive adult role models. Our goal is to make sure no child experiences further trauma, abuse, or exploitation.

The primary target population we serve is children, ages 0-17, who live in Atlanta, primarily Fulton County. These youths are disproportionately economically disadvantaged minorities who lack access to personal and public health resources. Last year we served 234 youth.

A Voices Program Update

We are pleased to share that we met or exceeded our outcome goals/objectives for the *Voices* program.

- Served 26 girls with programs and services customized to meet their individual case plans
- Connected six additional girls needing emergency placement and protection to safe house partners for residential treatment
- Voices participants maintained a 80% weekly attendance rate during weekly group sessions
- 90% of the girls maintained compliance with court mandates and decreased the number of times they ran away and/or reached out to appropriate adults before running away

- 80% of the girls increased their school attendance and/or significantly reduced truancy levels, and all of the girls were promoted to the next highest grade level
- 95% of the girls completed an individual action plan
- 100% of the girls completed an evaluation process before they left the program and/or transitioned to the alumnae program

Additional highlights of success include:

- We were able to increase the number of outings and community field trips for our Voices girls, including opportunities to attend the theater, World of Coca-Cola, National Center for Civil and Human Rights, College Tours, and several trips to Barefoot Ranch for equine therapy.
- We hired a survivor and incorporated “Dorsey’s Day” into the program. Dorsey shared her personal experiences. She also provided a copy of her book “Stretched Beyond Measure: The Angels were Crying” to each girl. Her personal testimony has helped girls to disclose their own sexual exploitation at faster rates than ever before.
- We hosted our annual Back-to-School Bash, making sure our clients had school supplies and hands-on activities included short-term goal setting, appropriate study habits, and preparing healthy breakfast items on a budget.

Daniela’s Story

At 16, Daniela came to youthSpark because she was missing too much school. She could no longer stand going because she was constantly mocked by other students. What her classmates didn’t know was that Daniela was forced to dance at a strip club in Atlanta and have sex with the men there to pay her family’s light bill and buy enough groceries to get by. The only thing in abundance in Daniela’s life was abuse, hunger, and shame.

Success can take many forms. In this case, success was embracing a model where we are able to, over time, help Daniela recognize the nature of an exploitative relationship. Daniela is not in a safe house, but she now recognizes that she was put into unhealthy and exploitative positions. Daniela does not want to give up, and has mapped out a positive path for her future. She continues to come to Voices, and is making a plan to start back and then finish her high school education.

Youth Service Center 2017-2018 Statistics

When youth come into our program we receive a referral from the Court, or an outside agency/organization. The following is an overview of our referral statistics:

- The average age of youth referred to the *Youth Services Center* is 13-years-old. The majority of youth referred to us are between the ages of 15 and 17 (66.1%). Almost a quarter are between the ages of 12 and 14 (22.1%).
- 85% of referrals are African-American, and 11% are Hispanic or Latino
- 5% are LGBTQ
- 57% are girls and 43% are boys

Reason for referral:

- 17% are referred to us for running away
- 13% are referred to us for an Education Recovery Program (ERP). This is for youth who have been referred to the court due to truancy. They meet with the education probation officer at the court, as well as a team of providers (mental-health professional, school social worker, education attorney and youthSpark) to develop a plan to help the youth get and remain on track in school.
- 11% are in the LEAP program (Leadership Education and Advancement Program) which is the Fulton County Juvenile Court’s special GED program.
- 3% are homeless
- 31% referred have a diagnosed mental or physical disability

At referral, we offered the following resources and services:

- 130 units of court advocacy
- 18 units of school supplies
- 18 units of hygiene products
- 13 units of emergency clothing
- 10 MARTA cards to assist the youth with transportation issues

Once a youth comes into our program, they are assigned as a “case” and we keep a detailed file of their progress and how we are able to assist them.

- Age of our 154 opened cases:
 - 16.23% have been open for more than 1 year
 - 23.42% have been open for 6 months to 1 year
 - 25.53% have been open for 2 months to 6 months
 - 22.4% have been open for 1 to 2 months
 - 8.96% have been open less than 30 days

- On average each month we provide 261 units of services or resources
- In the past year we provided:
 - 710 units of court advocacy
 - 611 units of individual counseling
 - 495 units of follow-up
 - 432 units of group treatment across our programs: Voices, Expressions, and Connections
 - 369 units of transportation
 - 311 units of individual advocacy
 - 127 units of crisis intervention

Our Work to End the “Demand” for Child Sex Trafficking

We have been very successful in advancing our “demand” reduction for child sex trafficking and research projects this past year.

In terms of demand reduction, our major project over the past year has been the complete system overhaul of Demand Tracker automated deterrence and law enforcement case prioritization system for sustainable nationwide rollout. The upgrade removed major barriers faced by national allies in implementing a customized version of Demand Tracker in their communities. The system now allow LE agencies to implement deterrence programs without worrying about costs and staffing requirements for maintaining the system. In addition, the system produces a compiled list of likely high-frequency buyers and aggressive buyers who use violent or threatening language when interacting with the system bot. The upgraded system also reduces youthSpark’s monthly costs of engaging in demand reduction work by approximately \$1000.

Last July, we contracted the development firm Content Thread to create, from-scratch, the .net site. This has been a major undertaking and we are 95% complete. We are 95% complete because we are moving into the full-beta testing phase to identify bugs and new functionality we would like to implement in the future. The beta-testing phase will last several months, and will coincide with our law enforcement demand reduction training.

Since January, youthSpark has been working with the Atlanta Police Department and DeKalb Police Department on rolling out a new demand reduction training program that is scheduled to being in January of 2019. youthSpark will be a key law enforcement partner.

Since January 2018, one of our staff members began serving on the demand reduction work group for the Human Trafficking Task Force and youthSpark is also a key partner in the National Center for Civil and Human Rights three-year public/private partnership to reduce demand.

What's Happening Inside youthSpark: Movers, Shakers, and Changemakers Event

In January, youthSpark held its second annual “Movers, Shakers & Changemakers” event, raising over \$70,000 to support our new Youth Services Center. These funds provided one-on-one case management, court and legal advocacy, group therapy from our licensed clinicians, gave youth safe transportation to and from the Fulton Juvenile Court, opportunities for personal and educational mentorship, and most importantly, hope for a brighter future. Over 150 of Atlanta’s top influential civic, business, and community leaders in attendance, who took in the beauty of The Wimbish House in midtown, which was graciously donated by the Atlanta Woman’s Club. At the event, youthSpark recognized the Fulton County Board of Commissioners for approving the build out of the YSC, and Ms. Jan Lennon, Hartsfield Jackson International Airport Security Director, for her leadership blazing the trail of corporate accountability in the fight against trafficking and exploitation.