1. About Think of Us

Think of Us is a research and design lab for foster care, driving equitable systems change so that the youth and families most impacted by foster care have the greatest power and opportunity to reshape it. We envision a world that offers every person the conditions they need to heal, develop, and thrive.

Virtual Support Services (VSS) serves as a resource referral model and kinship navigator program that links kinship and adoptive caregivers and current and former foster youth to both local and virtual resources and services via direct referrals. VSS aims to improve the connections between the needs of help seekers and the services that they are referred to and, ultimately, receive. Moreover, VSS aims to provide those connections in a way that demonstrates respect and responds to individuals’ own stated needs, thus making them feel heard and empowered regarding their unique circumstances.

VSS is designed to enhance connections between its caregivers and young people and services that meet the needs of the caregivers. Serving as a resource referral model, VSS aims to more effectively support formal and informal kinship caregivers, adoptive caregivers, and current and former foster youth in learning about, finding, and accessing resources and services to meet their needs and the needs of the children they are raising.

2. Purpose

Think of Us is seeking contracted consultation services to develop a program manual that supports evaluation and implementation of the VSS model. This includes development of new content and materials in collaboration with VSS staff and coordination with VSS leadership and staff to co-design and create specific content. The scope of work, deliverables and timeline for completion of this work are described below.

3. Timeline

The VSS team seeks a contractor who can support the team to meet the internal and external deadlines of the program manual. In addition to serving as a crucial next step in codifying nearly two years of work in VSS, the manual is required by What Works Clearinghouse for submission, for which we are simultaneously engaging in an evaluation of the program model. We aim to have the first draft of the manual completed by the end of February, 2023 and the final draft by May, 2023.
Below describes a suggested outline of benchmarks towards these goals, the details and specific guidelines of which would be fleshed out more precisely during a collaborative planning process:

October, 2022- Initiate work on manual, including review of current VSS documentation
November, 2022- Begin individual, pair, and group interviews (as needed) to identify program information held by VSS leadership and staff
December, 2022- Initiate draft of outline and contents of program manual, scheduling weekly or check-in as needed with VSS leadership team to ensure effective information-sharing and feedback
January, 2023- Initial draft of program-facing components of VSS program manual
February, 2023- Initial draft of VSS program manual in its entirety
March, 2023- VSS team gathers and provides feedback for any revision to program manual
May, 2023- Final draft of program manual to VSS team

4. Deliverables

I. Define audience for the program manual
The contractor will lead process to define the audience(s) for the program manual, addressing key questions such as:

☐ What will bring them to the manual?
☐ What is their level of expertise?
☐ In what industry do they work?
☐ Preference for written or visual content?
☐ Are there language or cultural references that need to be accounted for?

Answers will help right-size content, adjust audience skill level, their context, and their content preferences to fit skills and needs.

II. Plan content for the manual
The contractor will help strategically plan and structure content for the program manual. This includes conducting a comprehensive review and audit of all relevant existing VSS content and materials, planning for the development of new content and leveraging existing content. The contractor will lead the development and organization of the program manual layout.

III. Determine program manual format
The contractor will collaborate with the VSS leadership team to determine the format(s) best suited for the program manual to deliver the content (i.e., PDF guides, printed guide book, online courses, video tutorials, etc.). This will also be based on requirements of the Child Welfare Prevention Services Clearinghouse. Questions that will need to be considered include:

- Where are they as they consume this training manual?
- What tools and resources do they have at their disposal?
- What will they not have access to?
IV. Develop content
The contractor will develop the content, to include:

A. Background and introduction.
   To address the following content:
   - What is the program?
   - High level description of core program components
   - What are the core program components?
   - Research-base and theory supporting the program model

B. Practice Philosophy/Principles
   To describe values and principles that guide the approach to implementation.

C. Organizational Structure
   To include organizational and programmatic structures needed to support implementation
   (e.g. staffing and roles, technology).

D. Participant Recruitment and Selection
   To include information on target population, eligibility criteria for VSS, and recruitment
   methods

E. Building Community Support for and Engagement in the Program (Planning and Beyond)
   To include how the program builds support, informs the community and involves them
   during the planning phase, time expectations, and involvement of key stakeholders in
   decision-making and program governance

F. Core Components
   To include detailed descriptions of activities associated with each core program element
   - Practice Philosophy
   - Key Focal Areas
   - System Landscape and Needs Assessment
   - Proactive Outreach and Recruitment
   - Resource Referral and Acquisition Supports
   - Technology-Enabled Interventions
   - Strategic Service Partnerships
   - Rapid Cycle Phased Engagement
   - Supervision and Coaching

G. Trainee Recruitment, Selection, and Orientation
   To include description of the necessary requirements and competencies for staff, how to
   engage in recruitment of high quality staff, and training of the staff

5. Existing Roadblocks
The VSS team has been prepared to begin work on the evaluation and program manual for over 6
months, so there are no roadblocks in engagement or commitment to the process.
While there are internal documents for training of Community Responders that have been drafted and revised, several components of the manual will require collaboration to draft and refine them. Program components are in draft form and need work before being finalized. Additionally, several program components live more in the heads of leaders and staff at VSS, and documentation is sparse. The contractor will need to work with program leaders and staff to document current processes, in some cases with program content shared verbally in order to convert processes to the written manual.

While data dashboards and key components exist, since VSS only began in 2021, we remain in “start-up” mode, and there will need to be work done collaboratively between program staff and contractor to codify many components of the program manual.

6. Evaluation Metrics

Think of Us will evaluate partners and proposals based on the following criteria:

- Previous experience/past performance history
- Samples and/or case studies from previous projects (this does not need to be an actual program manual, just a comparable sample). Relevant experience can also be included.
- Projected costs
- Experience and technical expertise
- Responsiveness and answers to questions below as well as and submission requirements

7. Questions for Response

i. Based on the deliverables outlined in section 4, how might you/your organization approach gathering information and executing on the deliverables? Do you have examples you could provide of processes you have engaged in to arrive at similar deliverables?

ii. What is your experience with contracted or other work similar to that which has been requested above. If not specific manual work, describe how it relates to the work of a program manual intended to support the work of program as well as outline components needed for replicability. If you have done work submitted as part of an application to the What Words Clearinghouse, please describe. If you have not, please describe you/your organization’s experiences that evidence preparation to execute this project.

iii. Think of Us centers all our work in the lived experience of those who have experienced the foster care system first-hand. In the case of VSS, that includes both people who are or were in the foster care system, as well as kinship families raising children who are/were in foster care. How do you/your organization center lived experience in your work? How would you center lived experience in the work on deliverables described above.
Submission Requirements

Partners must adhere to the following guidelines to be considered:

- Only partners who meet all 5 metrics in the evaluation section should submit a proposal.
- Include applicable work samples and an itemized budget with your submission.
- Proposals should not be more than 5 pages (not inclusive of work samples).
- An acceptance of the timeline proposed above or any requests for modifications must be included and clearly expressed.
- Proposals are due September 23, 2022. Partners who are interested in submitting a proposal should inform Jesse Noonan, Vice President of Direct Impact, no later than September 16, 2023.

Contact Information

For questions or concerns connected to this RFP, we can be reached at:

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