

# FRIENDS OF THE CHILDREN–SEATTLE: 2015-16 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## Overview

*Friends of the Children* serves children and youth with multiple risk factors by providing paid mentors from 1<sup>st</sup> grade through high school completion. 60% of current program youth have 3 or more risk factors, 1 in 10 has 6 risk factors. The program focuses on five important developmental outcome areas: school success, pro-social development, making good choices, healthy habits, and skills and plans for the future. *Friends–Seattle* served 122 youth during the 2015-16 program year and spent, on average, 14 hours per month on each child.<sup>1</sup> In addition to direct contacts, *Friends–Seattle* connects youth to positive community activities and helps them access needed medical and social services.

## Long-Term Outcomes

| Goal  | <i>Friends–Seattle</i> Success Rate   |
|---|---|
| <b>Graduate from high school</b>                        | In 2015-16, 3 of 6 eligible youth earned their high school diploma. <i>Friends–Seattle</i> has had 26 program graduates: 21 (81%) have received a high school diploma or GED, 2 are working towards a GED, and 3 do not have either. Seattle Schools reported a 77% graduation rate for all students and 68% for low-income students. More than 20% of <i>Friends–Seattle</i> youth have a parent who did not complete high school. |
| <b>Avoid teen parenthood</b>                            | 94% of <i>Friends–Seattle</i> adolescents reported never having a child. 95% of youth were born to parent who was a teen parent.  |
| <b>Avoid involvement in the juvenile justice system</b> | 94% of <i>Friends–Seattle</i> adolescents have avoided ever being convicted of a crime. 54% of youth have a parent who has ever been incarcerated.  |

## School Success

- **Avoid suspensions and expulsions:** 87% of youth avoided suspensions and expulsions in 2015-16, including in-school suspensions. Seattle Schools reported an overall suspension/expulsion rate of 3% for all youth and 6% for low-income youth.
- **Meet grade level standards in reading and math:** The majority of youth met or exceeded standards in reading (74%) and math (74%).
- **Attend school regularly:** 51% of youth missed fewer than 10 days of school in 2015-16 and 80% of missed fewer than 18 days of school (the point of chronic absenteeism). Seattle Schools reported 89% of all youth, and 83% of low-income youth, missed fewer than 18 schools days.

<sup>1</sup> Average calculated using mentor self-reported direct and indirect time spent, which has historically been conservatively recorded. This average includes youth who were not engaged in services for the entirety of the program year.

## **Successes**

The *Friends–Seattle* program is commended for making a positive difference in the lives of children and youth in the Seattle Metropolitan area. The program met its goal of 14 hours of service on average for each child each month.

Of the six program graduates this year, three received their high school diploma and two are working toward completing their GED. The vast majority of youth have avoided teen parenting and juvenile justice involvement.

Despite being higher risk, *Friends–Seattle* youth were comparable to Seattle Metropolitan area (King County) youth in many areas, including suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, involvement in physical fights, preventive doctor and dentist visits, sexual intercourse, and past 30-day marijuana use. *Friends* youth had higher rates of weekly exercise than their peers in the county. Most youth are accessing medical care (89%). Almost all program youth have a positive view of the future.

## **Challenges**

Program youth face daily challenges and some have difficulty getting their needs met. In the academic arena, about half of program youth are missing 10 or more days of school and about 1 in 8 were suspended at least once, which creates disruption in learning. Youth reported limited access to healthy foods – only 1 in 4 reported eating fruits or vegetables on a daily basis. *Friend* report was even lower. This area is substantially lower than the rate in King County. *Friends* reported that just under half of their youth know how to handle an emergency and know how to safely use the internet or social media. For youth who come from challenging environments, a

focus on safety and preparedness is particularly important.

*Friends–Seattle* staff and board members implemented a strategic plan in September 2015. The program has made progress since last year, by providing professional development for *Friends* and supervisors/team leaders and increasing academic support and resources for youth. NPC encourages leadership to continue working on program enhancements in these areas.

The program also learned through this evaluation the challenges associated with collecting data consistently and thoroughly. The main report provides suggestions for how to augment evaluation data in the future.

## **Key Recommendations**

In addition to the efforts already in progress, evaluation data suggest the program could build on the following areas:

- Explore and address barriers to school attendance, school engagement, and positive behavior
- Provide social support; identify and meet mental health needs
- Teach and help youth practice self-management skills
- Reinforce and support health and safety
  - Ensure access to medical care, particularly for youth who experience life transitions (such as moving or changing caregivers)
  - Assist families in accessing, and encourage youth to choose, fruits and vegetables as part of their diet
- Teach youth how to stay safe, including protecting themselves online
- Work with staff and youth on how to set and pursue meaningful and achievable goals

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