

Our Work in Promoting Preteen Emotional and Behavioral Health

In 2000, after a year of research, planning and consultation with the community, the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health launched a grantmaking program to support the emotional and behavioral health of preteens. The following year, the Foundation added a data and research component to its work promoting preteens.

Now, after nearly a decade of investment, the Foundation is preparing to [shift its focus to a new area of children's health](#), but it has created a solid legacy in the preteen arena on which others may wish to build.

When the Foundation began its grants to support preteens, few organizations were working specifically on behalf of children ages 9 to 13, which constitutes a critical time of transition in a child's life. The Foundation sought not only to support agencies that would provide effective services for preteens, but also to raise public awareness about the needs of children this age and encourage others to work in this arena.

Through its experience with grantmaking, and the related research and evaluations it has commissioned, the Foundation has served individual children and families while also contributing to the knowledge base about preteens. A key finding has been that programs based on positive youth development principles have been the most effective in improving the emotional and behavioral health of preteens. After-school programs based on these principles have become the central program approach funded by the Foundation. These programs foster positive outcomes in youth while protecting them during the critical after-school hours when they might otherwise be most at risk. The Foundation's work also has highlighted the importance of supporting low-income youth, in particular, during their critical preteen years.

In concert with its grantees and other community partners, the Foundation has endeavored through a variety of vehicles to ensure that preteens live in nurturing communities and grow into healthy adults:

Grantmaking

Between 2000 and 2008, the Foundation awarded \$18 million in grants to organizations that foster emotional health in children ages 9 to 13. Grantees ranged in size from a small arts program run by a local church to large, multi-service programs serving hundreds of children. The grants funded a variety of program types, including individual mentoring and after-school programs.

All, however, were based on youth development principles, seeking to build resilience in young people to promote healthful choices, positive relationships and good decision making. In total, more than 60 agencies provided direct services to approximately 64,000 children and their families during this period.

In addition to supporting these individual programs, the Foundation has invested in a number of substantial grants designed to improve the systems that support preteens. Two recent examples are the [New Teacher Center](#) and [WestEd](#), which will support major new projects designed to change how schools think about the emotional health of students.

The three-year New Teacher Center grant will underwrite an innovative teacher training program that will reach more than 150 school districts in the state, training teachers to promote emotional resiliency of their students. The WestEd grant, also for three years, will support a pilot program that would enable schools across the state to examine their students' responses to the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), in conjunction with the students. The grant will help the schools build processes and modify school and community practices so that they support youth emotional and behavioral health. Both projects have evaluation components and will develop curricula to ensure replicability. Additionally, both programs are linked to statewide educational networks, which will increase the possibility of sustainability, once the pilots are completed.

Similar systemic grants include:

- [California School-Age Consortium \(CalSAC\)](#): To support a pilot project to address workforce development for after-school programs that serve preteens.
- [The Cleo Eulau Center](#): For a pilot program in which consultants provide coaching to teachers to help them find effective mechanisms to promote resiliency in high-risk youth who are challenging to teach.
- [The Community Network for Youth Development \(CNYD\)](#): To strengthen youth-serving organizations, including a program to support the participation of 20 San Mateo County youth service providers in a two-year Bay Area Quality Learning Network.
- [John W. Gardner Center \(JGC\) for Youth and Their Communities](#) at Stanford: To develop and disseminate a tool kit to train adults who work in schools and after-school programs on effective youth development practices.

In June 2009, the Foundation will award its final docket of grants in the preteen area, and these grants will include this type of systemic work.

Research and Data

To inform and support its grantmaking, the Foundation also has funded a body of research on preteen emotional and behavioral health.

One key resource for the field is a report prepared in 2008 by Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) titled "Putting It All Together" that [highlights six guiding principles of after-school programs](#) that are associated with positive outcomes for preteens:

Guiding Principles

Focused and Intentional Strategy: Programs have a clear set of goals, target specific skills, and deliberately plan all aspects of the program with a youth development framework in mind.

Exposure: Programs are designed to: a) provide preteens with a sufficient number of hours per week over an extended period of time, that matches program outcome goals; and b) allow preteens to attend a variety of activities.

Supportive Relationships: Programs emphasize positive adult-youth relationships regardless of the curriculum.

Family Engagement: Programs strive to include families through various strategies, such as clear communication and a welcoming environment.

Cultural Competence: Programs have diverse staff whose backgrounds are reflective of participants and who create practices and policies that: a) make services available to and inclusive of a variety of populations; and b) help participants understand and value a broad range of cultures.

Continuous Program Improvement: Programs strengthen quality through an ongoing and integrated process of targeted staff training, coaching and monitoring, and data collection and analysis.

A companion [Online Resource Guide](#) offers links to research and tools to strengthen after-school programs.

Other Foundation-commissioned research covered a variety of preteen topics:

- **Social and Emotional Learning in Schools:** A 2008 study by the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) at the University of Illinois Chicago, which analyzed effective practices to promote social and emotional learning of children in elementary and middle school. <http://www.lpfch.org/sel>
- **Doing Research with Preteens:** Education Training Research (ETR) in 2007 reviewed eight common methods used to collect data from preteens. The study evaluated and compared surveys (computer-based, PDAs, paper and pencil), diaries, interviews (phone, in person, focus groups), and observational methods. <http://www.lpfch.org/informed/facts/etr.html>
- **The Status of Preteens:** A 2006 baseline report, "[A Portrait of Preteens in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties](#)," provided an overview of local preteens, and a

- 2005 qualitative study focused on [issues affecting the emotional and behavioral health of low-income Latino preteens](#) in Santa Clara County.
- **Views of School-Based Counselors:** School counselors in San Mateo County participated in a 2005 qualitative/quantitative study that identified the key issues that affect preteens and examined how school-based counselors promote preteen emotional and behavioral health.
<http://www.lpfch.org/informed/preteens/counselorstudy.pdf>
 - **Parent Views About Preteens:** "How Preteens Are Faring in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties," was a 2003 survey that documented local parents' understanding of ways in which preteens were doing well, ways in which they were struggling, and the areas of most concern for parents -- all with an emphasis on emotional health. <http://www.lpfch.org/informed/preteens/preteensurvey.pdf>
 - **More on Parents of Preteens:** As part of two surveys of parents of children ages 0-18, conducted in 2005 and 2006, the Foundation was able to develop information specific to parents of preteens.
<http://www.lpfch.org/informed/facts/parentpoll.pdf>

As part of its Information work, the Foundation operates www.kidsdata.org, a robust website listing more than 250 indicators of children's health and well being in the Bay Area. [A summary of preteen data](#) provides a portrait of how these youth are faring. In the next few months, the site will include additional data from the California Healthy Kids Survey, self-reported information from fifth and seventh graders (along with older students) that will offer substantial information on what preteens have to say about their physical and emotional health.

Conferences and Convenings

To involve the community and offer opportunities for learning, the Foundation in 2003 convened [The Preteen Alliance](#), a collaborative that now numbers 1,600 members. The Alliance is devoted to disseminating information, sponsoring public events, supporting research, and serving as a network for individuals and organizations to connect, exchange information, and discuss key issues affecting preteens. [The Alliance website](#) draws more than 5,000 visitors each month, offers the most recent data and news about preteens, advice from expert columnists and information about community resources.

The [Preteen Post](#) is the Alliance's monthly newsletter, which provides updates on programs, events, news and research related to preteens.

The Foundation and the Alliance, which includes representatives from public and private organizations, have sponsored a [series of educational events on preteen-related subjects](#). These began with a 2002 event for teachers, and included two "Preteen Summits" in 2006



and 2009 attended by hundreds of parents, service providers and educators. Several smaller events covered topics ranging from the HPV vaccine and sex education to preventing drug and alcohol abuse and promoting healthy weight.

The Alliance also co-sponsored events on [mentoring](#), [student stress](#), helping students take action to improve their school environment, and two conferences "just for girls."

As part of its grantmaking work, the Foundation periodically has convened its grantees on relevant topics, such as evaluation, communications, and cultural competence. The latter convening included a report, "[Cultural Competency: What It Is and Why It Matters](#)," that specifically addresses non-profit service providers.

Media

In addition to its own websites, the Foundation has supported development of a [site devoted to preteen health](#), operated by the Palo Alto Medical Foundation, which covers an array of issues regarding physical and mental health.

As part of its public information work, the Foundation also has sponsored call-in radio shows on preteen topics in association with [Childhood Matters](#) (English) and [Nuestros Niños](#) (Spanish).

Evaluation

The Foundation has long maintained a commitment to evaluation, to ensure that it is an effective funder and community partner. The preteen grants program has been evaluated on three levels:

- 1) Assessments of individual grants
- 2) Assessments of funding priority areas
- 3) [Grantee/community feedback on the Foundation's performance](#)

Results of all formal evaluations to date are posted at <http://www.lpfch.org/grantmaking/resources/>. As part of this work, the Foundation in 2006 commissioned an evaluation of how well its grantmaking program had achieved its goals to date. Specifically, the evaluation set out to determine how well the funded programs were collectively succeeding in their focus area, and the extent to which the Foundation's grants followed effective practices, according to research. The evaluation reviewed 41 grantees in the preteen area. The analyses combined qualitative and quantitative data to help the Foundation understand the results of its funding and why those results occurred. Full results are available under "Evaluation of Grantmaking Priority Areas 2008" at <http://www.lpfch.org/grantmaking/resources/>.



The Foundation also has presented its evaluation work at three workshops sponsored by Northern California Grantmakers. In addition, in an unusual collaboration, a 2005 grant to the Children's Health Council helped four grantees build their agency's capacity to evaluate the effectiveness their programs. More information about this project soon will be posted online at <http://www.lpfch.org/grantmaking/resources/>.

In Summary

The Foundation is grateful to all its community partners for nine years of collaboration toward the goal of ensuring that preteens have the opportunity live in nurturing environments and grow into healthy adults. Through direct service, research and public education we have tried to bring attention to this crucial stage of life. The Foundation's preteen programs will continue through 2011, and additional data and resources will be added to the Preteen Alliance site as they are developed

Our hope is that other organizations will be inspired by the need and opportunity in the preteen realm, and will use our information and investments as a foundation to build ever more robust programs to support preteen emotional and behavioral health.