

Positive Futures I

ASSET DEVELOPMENT
AND WEALTH
CREATION PROJECT



Acknowledgements



We would like to thank the California Wellness Foundation for supporting the Positive Futures I—Asset Development and Wealth Creation project. For over 28 years the Wellness Foundation has been grantmaking to nonprofits that are advancing health and wellness for underserved people. Through their continued support, Time for Change Foundation has been able to help countless formerly incarcerated women of color overcome systemic barriers that prevent them from successfully reuniting with their children and from living healthy, thriving lives. We look forward to the continued partnership in providing access to women who are seeking a second chance. It's because of you, that we are able to sustain our housing and supportive services which enables us to create models that demonstrate profound effectiveness in the lives of the women we serve.



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Executive Summary

Time for Change Foundation is always thinking about innovative ways to help women improve their lives, their kids' lives, and create an environment where they can thrive. In understanding extreme poverty and looking at pathways out of it, we have to ask ourselves, "What does going from poverty to prosperity really look like?" We thought about what needs to be in place for people to maintain savings, acquire assets, and create wealth. How would we address some of these cultural norms that hinder progress? How can we ensure participants are supported along the process? Lastly, how can we partner with financial institutions to ensure that our people would have a fair opportunity?

What we found is that people need ACCESS. Using a public health perspective, we looked at a social-ecological framework for this pathway and created our Access Model. This new systemic platform is gender-specific and culturally sensitive to building healthy and stable lifestyles for targeted populations. The model considers the complex interplay between the individuals, relationships, the environment, community, and policy/advocacy. The model also suggests that in order to support Formerly Incarcerated Women of Color (FIWC) in reentry into the community, it is necessary to act across all levels of the Access Model with emphasis on trauma-informed, gender-responsive access.

We learned that when people have access to what they need they can be successful and we set out to prove that point. We thought about how to address social-economic factors such as food, clothes, and shelter so we culminated our experience and those of others and came up with the following information:

KEY FACTS

NUMBER OF WOMEN IN THE INLAND EMPIRE

2.32 MILLION

Source: 2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimate

EARNINGS GAP, WOMEN TO MEN

\$0.68/\$1.00

RACIAL EARNINGS GAP: WHITE MEN VS. WOMEN

White Male	\$1.00
Asian Female	\$0.71
White Female	\$0.67
Black Female	\$0.60
Hispanic Female	\$0.42
Native Am Female	\$0.36

Source: 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

WOMEN'S SHARE OF LOCAL ELECTED OFFICES

SCHOOL BOARD: 51%

CITY COUNCIL: 26%

COUNTY LEADERSHIP: 21%

Source: CSI-UCR Analysis of School Board, City, and County Data Estimate

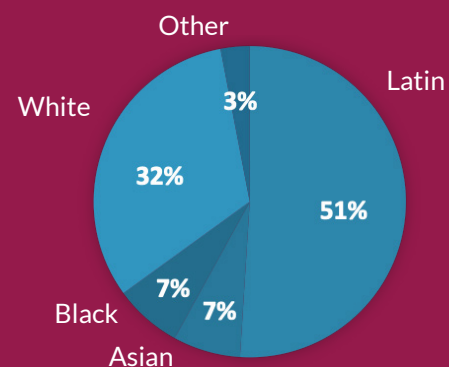
LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

WOMEN: 51%

MEN: 26%

Source: 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimate

RACE/ETHNICITY OF WOMEN IN THE I.E.



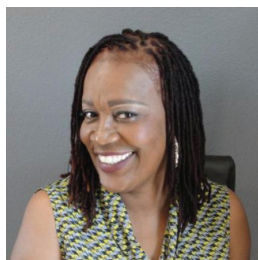
Source: 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year PUMS

- Overall, in the Inland Empire, Black women are at a 24% poverty rate and Hispanic women are at a 22% poverty rate
- A U.S. study stated, formerly incarcerated Black women experience the most severe levels of unemployment at 43.6%, Hispanic women are at 39.4%
- Gender pay gaps and racial disparities make it harder for women of color to become homeowners
- In 2019, Black homeownership rates were at the same rate as they were when the Fair Housing Act was signed into law in 1968, eliminating all increase since then

- In the U.S., nearly 5.8 million people have jobs in healthcare that pay less than \$30,000 a year, half are nonwhite and 83% are women
- 1/3 of jobs held by women have been designated as essential and held by nonwhite women

The women that participated in this project expressed the difference having access to people and programs that provide them with the support to be economically stable made all the difference. However, we know that we cannot do this work alone. We need partners that are willing to rise above systemic and societal norms and break down walls that keep people out rather than welcoming them in. Only then will we see women overcome obstacles, provide for their children, and thrive.

Since 2002, TFCF has been assisting homeless women and children achieve self-sufficiency by providing housing and necessary supportive services. In response to the housing crisis and effects of mass incarceration and family separation, TFCF implemented an array of evidenced based programs, housing and trauma informed approaches to address their needs. We currently operate 3 emergency shelters, 10 units of permanent-supportive housing and the Phoenix Square, our first affordable housing development. To date, we have reunified 298 children from foster care back with their mothers and have helped over 1,700 homeless women and children become self-sufficient. The mission of Time for Change Foundation is to empower disenfranchised, low income individuals and families by building leadership through evidence-based programs and housing to create self-sufficiency and thriving communities.



Kim Carter
Founder/Ambassador



Vanessa Perez
Director

Introduction

Time for Change Foundation's (TFCF) Positive Futures I Project is our asset development and wealth creation project for black and brown, formerly incarcerated women. As evidenced in our "Invisible Bars – Barriers to Women's Health and Well Being During and After Incarceration" report using a social ecological model of programming to support black and brown women impacted by the criminal justice system yields very high results across several socio-economic indicators. The purpose of the Asset Development and Wealth Creation project is to demonstrate that, by creating the Access Model for this target population, we can address disparities, ensure equitable access to financial wealth building resources, and provide strength-based, trauma-informed wrap-around services, which includes housing. Additionally, in an effort to change perceptions and address institutionalized systemic barriers to wages, we engaged and trained employers to adopt a trauma-informed, strength-based workplace culture where formerly incarcerated women of color (FIWC) could work in a healthy, non-judgmental environment.

We partnered with experts in various industries to support this project and most importantly, the women. Entrepreneurs taught classes on how to start a business and provided a scholarship opportunity for the women to apply for funding that would help them with their business license. Wells Fargo provided Financial Literacy classes and helped position our women for financial success. Our women entered into higher education and had access to jobs that would build their career pathways.

For the first 6 months of the program year, TFCF provided:

Planning and Community ACCESS Services that included Client Engagement in Design, Community Engagement, Team Development, Establishing Linkages, Creating Tracking Tools, Employer Surveys and GAIN Certifications.

Global Appraisal of Individual Needs (GAIN) is the assessment tool utilized for this project.

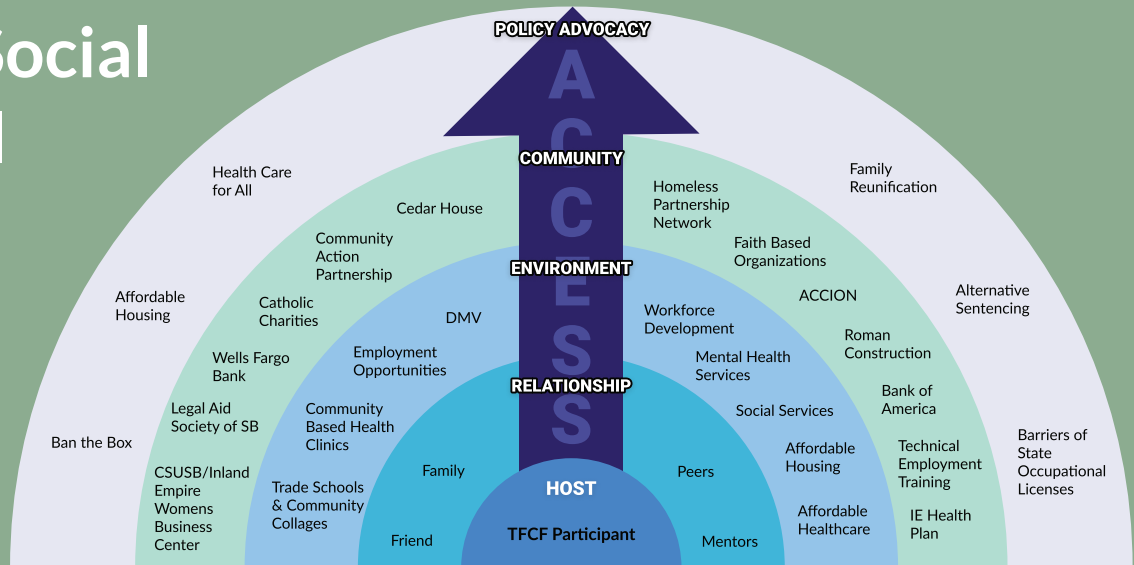
For months 6 through 18 of the program year, TFCF provided:

Direct Program Services to FIWC – Included use of evidence-based practices in supporting FIWC in accessing resources to reduce homelessness and recidivism and to lead to stable financial self-sufficiency. In total, this evaluation covers an 18-month period and is reflective of 49 participants.

In total, there were two (2) cohorts with a 100% retention rate.



“Access” Social Ecological Model



Overall Program Planning and Community ACCESS Services followed the ‘Access’ social ecological framework project by adopting a rigorous plan for accessing each project component and its capacity to address:

A) Institutionalized systemic barriers in the areas of employment and asset development

To this end, TFCF has made significant strides in addressing these barriers by:

- Hosting classes and workshops for program enrollees
- Addressing issues arising since the passage of Ban the Box in accessing employment
- Removing restrictions on licensing
- Eliminating discrimination based on sources of income for Section 8 housing

B) By the development of effective gender-specific and culturally sensitive, trauma-informed strength based support that:

- Affords FIWC to experience sustained employment and healthier living
- Increases employers' capacity to engage FIWC by offering a gender responsive, trauma-informed strength-based workplace
- Expands opportunities to FIWC to access financial, entrepreneurial opportunities and assets.

To this end, TFCF has been successful in developing needed, culturally-sensitive trauma-informed strength-based support in the areas of:

- **Affording FIWC the opportunity to experience sustained employment and healthier living by:**
 - Providing gender and culturally affirming approaches
 - Delivering trauma-informed services to FIWC
 - Providing mentorship and problem solving support (i.e. auto assistance, child care, etc.) to ensure continued attendance at work

- **Engaging employers' capacity to engage FIWC by offering a gender-responsive, trauma-informed strength-based workplace by conducting trainings and presentations to:**

- 400 employers and stakeholders on "Tapping the talent of unique populations" (specifically FIWC) to San Bernardino Chamber of Commerce, I.E. Black Chamber of Commerce, and SB County Annual Homeless provider Summit
- Inland Empire Health Plan stakeholders providing education, gender-responsive and trauma-informed care linking poverty as a major social determinant of health

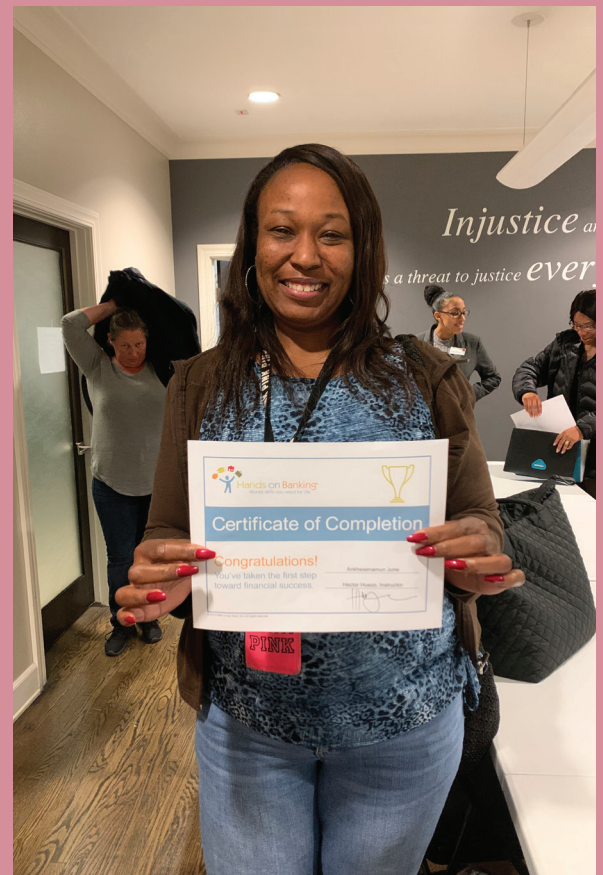
- **Offering expanded opportunities to FIWC to access financial, entrepreneurial opportunities and assets by:**

Partnering with Wells Fargo to:

- Increase FIWC's knowledge and understanding of assets and wealth building strategies
- Assist with Credit Repair and access to their credit report
- Budgeting and Financial Planning
- Entrepreneurship Workshops
- Create Savings Accounts and share basic lending practices



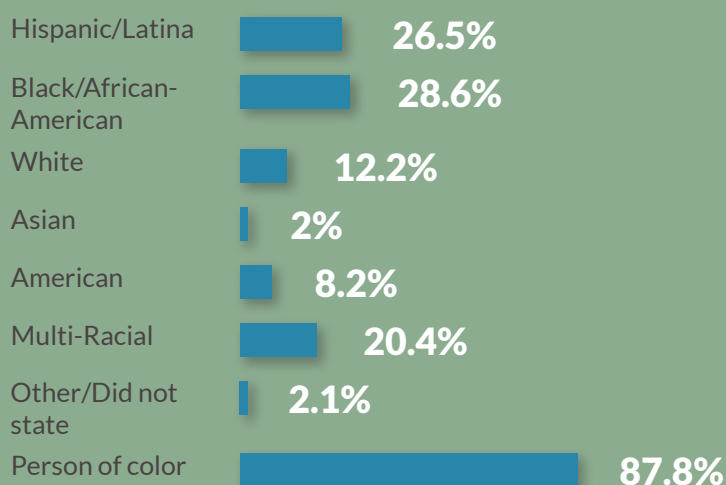
"I learned how to save money. I have savings and now I can pay for things like fixing my car."





Positive Futures I Project had two cohorts of participants. Cohort 1 was 29 individuals and Cohort 2 was 20 individuals which both had a **100% retention rate**.

Ethnicity/Race

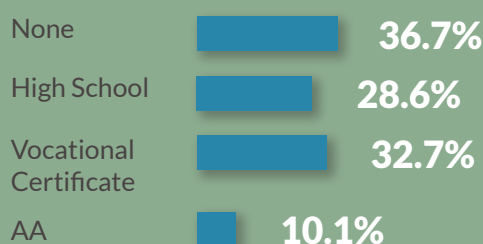


TFCF's program clients are ethnically diverse, and are primarily women of color (87.8%).

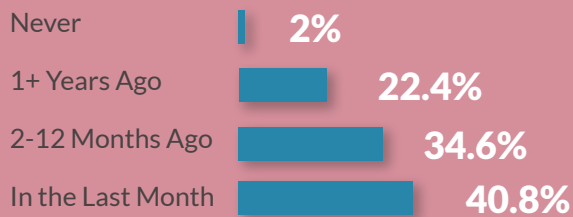


Education

36.7% of program participants have no high school diploma. 28.6% have graduated high school and 32.7% have attained a vocational certificate. Only 10.2% have attained an Associate's Degree, which is the highest degree among the client population.



Last under financial stress



Financial stress and the threat of homelessness was pervasive among program participants at intake. The average number of days out of the last 90 days that clients were significantly stressed about finances was more than 1/3 of the time. Forty point eight percent of clients had faced significant financial stress in the last month.

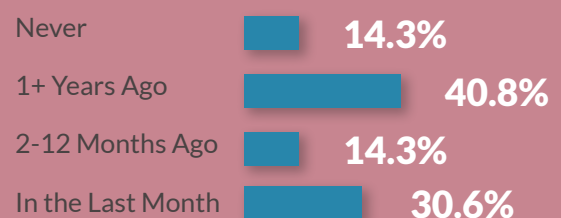
“Workshop skills on interviewing – all the tools we basically need [are] in the classes. I got four interviews and three jobs offers! And now I can see how people feel. I get to pick the right job for me and I’m looking at my schedule.”

“I have my entrepreneurship mentor. My non-profit will be mentoring young girls who are lacking skills and I’ve applied for my Federal ID number to start my non-profit. I also have two teen daughters.”

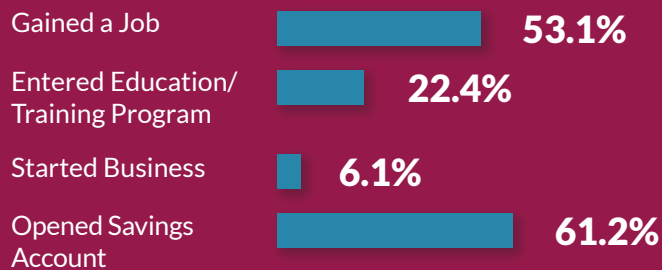
Increasing earning potential is a key strategy to Asset Development and Wealth Creation

Last worked

Only 30.6% of program participants had worked in the last month; 14.3% had never worked and 40.8% had not worked in more than a year. The client population had high rates of unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment.



Outcomes



Employer focused

TFCF felt strongly that local employers needed to be educated and trained on how to employ formerly incarcerated women of color and provide a gender responsive work environment where all women feel valued and supported.

We developed a set of strategies that targeted the issues that emerged directly from the women's lived experiences and sought the support of our local Chamber of Commerce. TFCF was successful in hosting 4 Employer Education workshops, each lasting for 2 hours over a 6 month period and we reached 421 employers.



Based on the surveys from the employer workshops,

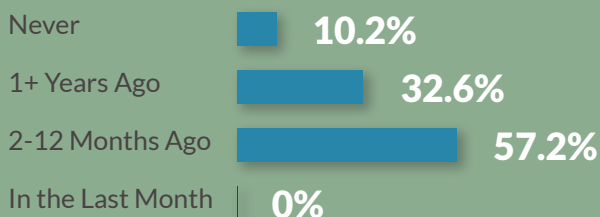
- 72% of the respondents indicated that they would be willing to hire a formerly incarcerated women of color
- 42% indicated that they would implement at least 3 gender responsive strategies into their workplace
- 31% indicated that they would be interested in learning more about gender-responsive strategies and principles as it relates to higher productivity at work



“Every time I’d come out of prison I’d do drugs and not be in society, so I’m learning to be a normal productive person. I got a job – well, two! I’m trying to be a moral, right citizen and have integrity.”

The Access Model addresses underlying health related challenges by ensuring services are accessible.

Last used substances



Underlying many of the participant’s prior criminal justice involvement and negative behaviors were substance abuse and mental health disorders. Only 10.2% of program participants never had issues with drug or alcohol abuse; 57.2% of participants had experienced such issues within the past year.

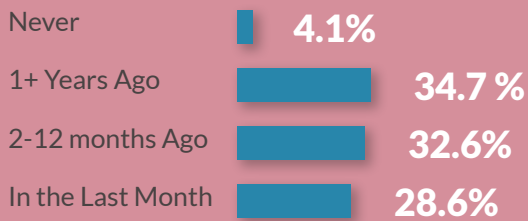
Experienced in Past Month

A history of substance use was heavily comorbid with a history of mental health disorders, the most common of which were depression and anxiety. 77.8% of program participants had a history of one or more mental health challenges. Many program participants had experienced depression and anxiety within the last 30 days.



“TFCF was the start of my mental change. I’ve been through a lot of things; I was a foster care child. TFCF sent me to see a therapist, because I’d kept things inside for too long. And once I spoke, I could finally uncage that little hurt girl inside of me.”

Last Incarcerated



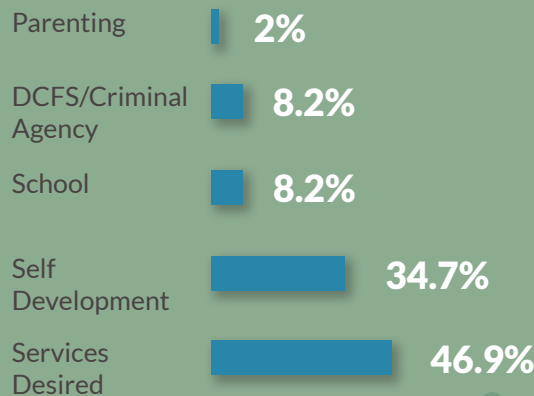
There were also clear links between barriers to employment due to stigma against formerly incarcerated persons and high unemployment rates. Ninety-five point nine percent of TFCF program participants had been incarcerated in their past, 61.2% of them in the last year.

“They gave me new skills that I had to re-learn. I learned coping skills in prison, but it’s a different kind of coping I do now. I go to the grocery store and I have automatic panic attacks. I didn’t feel like I belonged out here, even though I dreamed of this day. They hold my hand and let me know it’s going to be OK in my everyday struggles.”



Primary motivation for enrolling

Positive Futures I Program participants were motivated to join the program by a variety of factors. The most common reasons were for self-development (34.7%), motivation to become a better person, build a better life, learn new skills, and to receive critical supportive services such as housing (46.9%). **It is important to note that nearly 50% of participants needed housing assistance.**



"I had to get housing within six months to get my kids back, and housing doesn't come as it should. It's not affordable. Especially the income and everything – lots of stress."

TFCF has excellent program retention rates, a difficult goal to reach for the target client population. TFCF has a strategy that works and program leaders say that retention "happens when the client walks through the door." That is, from the first contact with the client, TFCF staff are building a relationship so that retention rates remain astoundingly high (100%). Its holistic, comprehensive approach to supporting marginalized and stigmatized women works to both address structural

barriers to their future success and internal gaps in their own resiliency to cope with the difficulties of life.

TFCF's Positive Futures I Program impact goes beyond employment opportunities; it positively impacts participants' whole lives.



Housing

According to our survey, housing insecurity was deemed a number one factor in our clients' ability to engage and maintain employment. Fortunately, housing is TFCF's priority stepping-stone in that we recognize that with stable and safe housing, many women are able to achieve their desired dreams. We are excited 100% of our PF1 clients have received stable housing through this project.



Training Delivered

Wells Fargo did an excellent job providing the financial education and money management workshops to our clients. Our survey results revealed that 90% of the women had never had formal banking relationships and that they always handled their financial needs with local markets and/or check cashing places to pay their bills, get money orders, etc.

The classes were held weekly for 1.5-hour durations for a total of 10 weeks and 85 % of the women demonstrated a newfound skill set and established a savings account and budgeting.

Our Employment Development training morphed into a combination of resumes, interviews, job search strategies and therapeutic sessions. Our singular focus was to get women in position to conduct great

interviews, wear appropriate dress attire and fill in the gaps on their resume; however, it was revealed that women had been traumatized in the workplace. The women shared feelings of being treated less-than due to their past criminal records and feeling ashamed and worthless because this scenario had played out in several different temp jobs. One client said she was the only black woman working in the laundry facility and that all of her coworkers spoke languages other than English so there was no sense of belonging in that environment. TFCF adapted and incorporated Leadership Development, advocacy training to build women's self-esteem, and self-worth, while creating the life skills needed to thrive in any work environment.

Access

noun: the **freedom** to **obtain** or make use of something



TFCF implemented 4 strategies related to asset development and wealth creation: Financial literacy, Employment development, Grants, Wealth & Health (GWH), Entrepreneurship training.

In short, the Access Ecological Model has proven effective in impacting the following:

- Increase in the # of employers in the service area who have or who are willing to complete TFCF training workshops on hiring formerly incarcerated women of color. TFCF's workshop in Ontario, CA reached capacity with 200 participants/employers agreeing to adopt some or all of principles presented (by show of hands)
- Increase in the willingness of FIWC participating in the program to access college records and/or job training workshop records. See Focus Group Results for skills learned, use and integration of job coaching, and increased competency/mastery of skills (as assessed during workshop/classes participant satisfaction and self-assessment feedback)
- Increase in the willingness of program

participants seeking employment, considering entrepreneurial endeavors, and/or new employment opportunities among FIWC wanting to increase their income/earnings

- Increase in Financial literacy among FIWC attending program classes/workshops (participant satisfaction and self-assessment feedback and Focus Groups)
- Minimized difficulties in navigating and accessing social services among FIWC that access and use available services (through self-reporting)
- Increased satisfaction with various elements of program
- Community and FIWC participation in program design and services (including suggestions/recommendations for program improvement)

The designed approach considers a complex interplay between the individuals, relationships, the environment, community, and policy/advocacy. Year 2 analysis will demonstrate impact as it relates to program overall objectives.

Evaluation Process & Tracking Tools

“TFCF helps us navigate every step of the way. It’s very important to have the physical and emotional support.” - Program participant

The Program Evaluation Team worked with TFCF and program staff in:

- Identifying any problems with meeting benchmarks and defining enhancement strategies
- Identifying challenges during quarterly meetings and identifying strategies for addressing barriers and continuous improvement
- Providing updates on progress in meeting benchmarks (both positive and negative) during quarterly meetings and via annual reporting
- Seeking support from California Wellness Foundation’s Evaluation Partners for approval and feedback of program’s planned approach and efforts to define impact of the Access Ecological Model as a Best Practice Model for use at national or state conferences

From Licensed Vocational Nurse to Registered Nurse



An LVN can average about \$50,000 annually. As an RN, Keisha automatically increased her earning potential starting at \$70,000 with the opportunity of reaching over \$100,000 annually. In addition, she holds a National Wound Care Certification, an accreditation that only 1,600 healthcare professionals carry in the State of CA.

Approach: Tracking Tools and Focus Groups

The following outcomes evaluation used a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative data available through TFCF's internal services provision tracking spreadsheet and GAIN assessments, with qualitative data collected in two focus groups of clients.

The TFCF Services Provision Tracking Spreadsheet included information on the completion rate of the various programmatic educational workshops by clients, as well as every clients outcomes related to financial self-sufficiency.

The GAIN assessments provided information on client demographics and clients' histories of financial stress, mental health challenges, substance use, and criminal justice involvement.

The focus groups provided data that, in clients' own words in response to open-ended questions, afforded the evaluator the data necessary to assess perceived impact in clients' lives.

The focus groups included a total of 14 participants: 6 graduates (from Cohort 1) of the Positive Futures I Program and 8 participants (from Cohort 2).

The following table maps each of the outcome's objectives with specific indicators and instruments.

The following indicators were selected by TFCF's Evaluation Team and used to measure progress toward the program goals:

Objective	Indicators
Maintain a completion rate of 90% of program participants.	TFCF Services Provisions Tracking Spreadsheet
Increase access to career pathways and training on employment, housing, and/or entrepreneurship for 75% of program participants.	TFCF Services Provisions Tracking Spreadsheet Baseline: GAIN (B12ED; WP1E; SS1G; SS1G1; SS2B)
80% of program participants experience increased financial opportunities. 50% demonstrate an increase in financial literacy. 25% increase their use of financial institutions.	Baseline: GAIN (B12ED; WP1E; SS1G; SS1G1; SS2B) TFCF Services Provisions Tracking Spreadsheet Focus Groups

Summary of Outcomes

Objective	Outcomes
Retention: Maintain a completion rate of 90% of program participants.	Exceeded
Career Pathways: Increase access to career pathways and training on employment, housing, and/or entrepreneurship for 75% of program participants.	Exceeded
85% of FIWC will demonstrate increased workforce/job skills with 70% showing gainful employment or a business start <i>Indicators:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in Employment • Increase in social benefits • Increased Learning (surrounding job skills, job search, advancement) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 53.1% of clients gained a job; • 22.4% entered education or training programs; and • 6.1% started their own business.
85% will demonstrate increased financial literacy and 70% adopting wealth- building behaviors and strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators • Use of Financial Institution • Use of Bank Accounts • Savings • Personal Financial Plan • Identify Wealth-building practices Identifying or using assets to generate revenue Adopting wealth building practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% of program participants demonstrated increased financial opportunities. • 50% demonstrated an increase in financial literacy. • 25% increased their use of financial institutions; • 61.2% of program participants opened savings accounts.

Resiliency results from a combination of external and internal factors, both necessary to face adversity and challenges productively and in ways that result in positive life outcomes. External factors include social and structural support, such as positive, trusting relationships; advisors or mentors; and the resources necessary to implement desired change (such as access to housing, education, and employment). Internal factors include life skills, optimism, selfworth, and self-efficacy – the attitudes and skills necessary to cope with negative circumstances and emotions productively, to trust that a better life is possible, and to feel one is worthy of that better life. The

focus group data demonstrated clear, consistent trends among program participants that the Positive Futures I Program did substantially more than help formerly incarcerated women gain financial literacy, employment skills, and greater opportunities for building wealth. In short, the program substantially increased participants’ resiliency overall – in both their external and internal resilience factors – which led to substantial positive changes not only in their employment, but also in their relationships with their family and their building of relationships with new friends.

Summary of Outcomes

Objective	Outcomes
<p>Increased prosocial behavior in 80% of program participants as well as supporting 80% of the FIWC in experiencing/demonstrating increased mental well-being/health</p> <p><i>Indicators of risk:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of life • Satisfaction with self • Specific mental health symptoms • Feeling bothered by mental health symptoms <p><i>Indicators of resiliency:</i> Supporting 80% of FIWC demonstrating increased mental well-being/health)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement in supportive recovery groups • Engagement in supportive relationships • Benefitting from project advocacy and engagement of area employers • Satisfaction with personal relationships Increase in stabilized living (supporting pro-social skills and mental health/ well-being) <p><i>Indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing location (limited crime, drugs, graffiti, homelessness) • Satisfaction with living space • Currently enrolled in school/job training program • Currently employed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 77.8% of program participants had a history of one or more mental health challenges • Only 12.2% of clients had no history of depression, and only 16.3% had no history of anxiety • Only 10.2% of program participants never had issues with drug or alcohol abuse • 57.2% of participants had had such issues within the past year • For housing, we are excited that through this project 100% of our PF1 clients received stable housing • TFCF was successful in hosting 4 Employer Education workshops, each lasting for 2 hours over a 6 month period and we reached 421 employers

MHM & Associates and its Industry Experts have evaluated mental health and social services programs for a decade. Lead Evaluator Dr. Kirner states, “It is rare to see programs that operate with as much attentiveness to the holistic needs of their clients as TFCF’s Positive Futures I Program, and the positive outcomes – not only those quantifiable (such as gaining employment) but also those less tangible, yet no less significant (building self-worth) – speak for themselves. In their own words, program participants are transforming their lives, not just because they were given the training, services, and advocacy support to do so, but also because TFCF’s program staff models what healthy, skilled, caring

relationships look like, and this teaches program participants that they are worthy and capable of change.” Dr. Kirner further states, ‘This internal shift drives the participants’ motivation to learn and employ the skills, strategies, and techniques the program teaches, believing (often for the first time in their lives) that they deserve and can achieve success’.

Impacts on Children

“I made a promise to my kids and I’m keeping it. I never forget where I came from.” - Program participant

Many Positive Futures I program participants were mothers who faced significant challenges in reunifying with their children. Their children often spent time in foster care, and reunification proved to be very challenging, both in terms of structural barriers (particularly housing) and in terms of emotional coping. One participant described the housing crisis: “I had to get housing within six months to get my kids back, and housing doesn’t come as it should. It’s not affordable. Especially the income and everything – so it’s lots of stress.” TFCF addresses both of these challenges in its program, providing stable housing support and also teaching program participants how to manage their emotions, as well as how to advocate and use legal resources.



One program participant explained the emotional challenge in reunifying with her children after they had a long period in foster care: “The aftermath of reunification is hard. TFCF helps you out, but they tell you it’s going to be hard. The two kids don’t get along. It’s very difficult and stressful. I used to be off the chain: yelling, [being] aggressive, and demanding [to my kids] ‘This is how you do it!’ I lived in Sweet Dreams [TFCF housing for mothers] and learned from other mothers doing it the right way – learned you don’t have to yell or spank them – they don’t have to fear you to understand and listen. Having life skills and someone to listen and help me was important. If I didn’t have anyone to talk to, I’d just stuff it. Just stuff, stuff, stuff – and getting it out on a daily basis helps.” The outcomes of the Positive Futures I Program went beyond the participants: perhaps most importantly, it provided better outcomes for the participants’ children. One participant summed it up: “My kids notice the differences in me the most.”



Building a Compassionate Community

“TFCF is evidence-based. They utilize a lot of things that work for us. It’s no nonsense. You can see where you came from to where you are now: the achievement, discipline, and structure.”

“Hearing everyone’s testimony gave me the strength to keep going on.” - Program participant

TFCF program participants often described that the group-based nature of the workshops were instrumental in helping them feel less alone and providing the social support necessary to feel they could change their lives in a positive way. One summarized it as: “This group provides new family and friends,” to which many of her peers nodded. Another stated, “Seeing other people I’ve been in the program with and where I’m at, and where they’re at – it doesn’t even matter the differences we had. We just want people to come back [and stick with the program].” Her peer responded, “I’ve made new friends and associates, and they’re way more positive and productive [than my past friends]. I’m no longer attracted to negativity.”

Many participants noted that TFCF staff were a decisive factor in their successful navigation of positive life change, describing how the staff’s consistent support and positivity modeled positive

outlook necessary for them to have in the face of adversity. They further demonstrated what a functional team-based, collaborative approach to problem-solving looks like. One participant said, “[They’re] always staying positive. They collaborate, so if one doesn’t know, they’ll all help. They’re full of resources and whatever they can’t help with, they find someone to help.” Another participant described the depth of caring TFCF staff display in the program: “The staff here genuinely cares.

“Advocacy for others is also advocating for myself. Helping others helps me. Lift them up and in turn you’ll be lifted up.”

It’s family. It’s not just their job. They genuinely love us and want us to succeed. They’re always there for me. They allow me to be me. This is my extended family.”

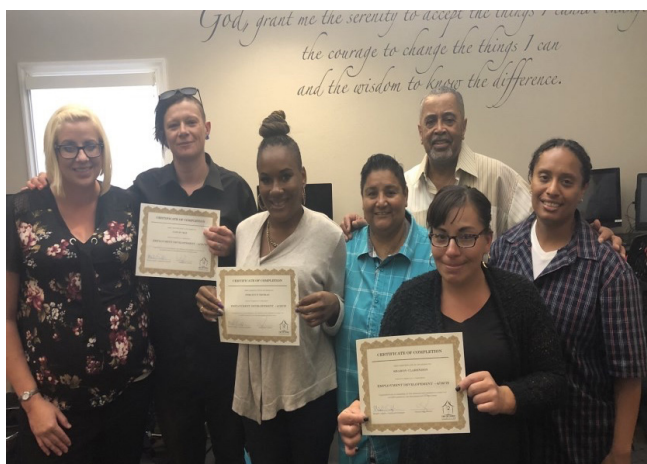
The depth and consistency of the TFCF staff’s expressions of caring, compassionate support to program participants allowed the women to develop a sense of self-worth and self-efficacy.

One program participant emotionally described how the consistency of care by TFCF staff helped her change how she viewed herself:

"They didn't stop reaching out to me, and that meant a lot to me. Because TFCF really cared about me. Some people just pass you on, pass you on in other programs, and people then drop out. I learned that I'm not a failure. I'm not a failure! I was in and out of prison for 16 years. I would get released and come back into society, and because of the [incarceration] record, we're limited in resources. There's nothing to let us know we can do it. We go back because it's all we know. TFCF helped me see I'm not a failure, that I CAN do it."

Another participant echoed her sentiments: "When I got here, TFCF staff showed me that I was worth loving, that I'm important. If I'm going through trials and tribulations, that's because God has something better and bigger on the other side. What my past is, is what I did. It's not who I am. I've had anger problems since I was little, and I'm finally applying those [coping] tools. TFCF is showing me that if I learn to trust me, I can learn to trust others."

"I'm going to succeed – I'm already a success!"



Learning Strategies for Life

“If TFCF is constantly reaching out to us, then we can reach out to others.” - Program participant

TFCF program participants often described how the Positive Futures I Program provided them with holistic, comprehensive group workshops that helped them learn skills for changing their whole lives. These skills included: setting boundaries, having discipline, perseverance, organization, managing difficult emotions, making decisions, and collaborating to help others. One participant explained: “Boundaries are important because at first I didn’t have any. Now I have the courage to set those.” Structure, organization, and discipline were also qualities TFCF program participants learned: “I didn’t have any structure at all [at first]. This looks like calendars – setting a schedule and sticking to it, and also not doing the wrong thing.” Another participant described how the program helped her learn how to make better decisions: “I know there is a consequence for everything I do – TFCF gives you a consequence to make you think, but they give you options and they give you support. So, you make decisions – and to me, choice is important, because in prison I had no choice. As a kid being raised, I had no choice. So, it’s important to utilize my thinking and choices. It’s empowering. Certain decisions, I’m still like ‘What should I do, guys?’ and they’re like, ‘Think!’ And I get confused and overwhelmed, but they talk me through it and coach me on how to think. Allowing me to be the decision maker and giving me the option to choose [is important].”

The group-based, collaborative, highly supportive framework of TFCF’s Positive Futures I Program led to program participants valuing help and support, as well as seeing themselves as capable of meaningfully providing this to other women. One program participant described the process: “Advocacy for others is also advocating for myself. Helping others helps me. Lift them up and in turn you’ll be lifted up.” The dream of helping others led to tangible goals that combined participants’ visions for their careers with their desire to help people who, like themselves, had struggled with trauma, marginalization, and incarceration. One participant’s goal evolved from her own daughters’ experiences: “I’ve applied for my Federal ID number to start my non-profit. I have my entrepreneurship mentor. My non-profit will be mentoring young girls who are lacking skills. I have two teen daughters. I watched the foster system fail them, and I want to be in their lives and help as many young girls as I can.” Another had similar goals: “I’m going to school to be a youth counselor. I want to go back to Juvenile Hall and help the youth there. I committed my crime at 12, and then was tried as an adult. And there were no programs back then. And kids will always say to counselors: ‘You’ve never been there!’ But I have.”

Conclusion

The power of being able to work, provide for your family, and feel productive is amazing! TFCF's goal here was simple: How do we help women to get in position to help themselves and others? Recognizing that there are many barriers, prejudices, and self-hindering behaviors that, all too often, snuff out any flicker of hope that our women may have, we thought about our various cultures and how we survived being entrenched in poverty, social inequities, and the proliferation of mass incarceration in our communities. We tried to reimagine what it would look like if women of color had access to the resources they needed. We looked at our sisters and decided that we needed to create a model where women of color had access.

Therein lies the Access Model, which incorporated a social-ecological framework that identifies the epidemiology of poverty. Yes, we decided to address root causes and conditions, while creating a "pathway from poverty to prosperity". We want to highlight the amazing professional women who shared so much insight along this path in implementing this pilot project. A pilot means that it is something that has never been done and you want to test it out. We are happy with our results, but not yet satisfied. We recognize the need for more resources directed at solidifying this path.

The women on this journey are so resilient, creative, and brilliant that it's just phenomenal to watch. As we look to consistently improve upon this model, we are looking for patent lawyers, entrepreneurs that have scaled their products across state lines, and marketing

gurus to support our Access Model. There is so much more to be done but we are blazing a new path forward. The trickle-down economy isn't effective, and the idea of working at one job and moving up isn't happening. What is materializing is that women are getting higher education, starting their own businesses, and pooling their resources to leverage their capital. Maslow's Hierarchy is still so relevant today because when women had access to their basic needs, they were able to climb the social-economic ladder. In life, things happen and we deal with it but when you have a "support system", your sisters show up for you. On the way to work, one of the participant's cars would not start and she immediately called her support team, got a ride to work, and was on time. In the meantime, ACCESS to a local mechanic in our community fixed her car as part of his charitable donation to our agency. This allowed our participant to maintain her savings and stay on track with her financial goals.

At Time for Change Foundation, we are creating pathways for formerly incarcerated women of color to have access to equitable resources, relevant knowledge, and unlimited opportunities to live successful lives. No, we are not done with this work, but we have the facts that reveal what our women need and the tools to give them exactly that.

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