



Office of  
Population Affairs

# Michigan Department of Health and Human Services: Serving Expectant and Parenting Youth Involved with Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems

## Overview of the Pregnancy Assistance Fund

Finding ways to address the diverse needs of expectant and parenting youth and their families (EPY) to improve their health, education, and well-being is a long-standing priority of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The HHS Office of Population Affairs (OPA) funded the Pregnancy Assistance Fund (PAF) grant program from 2010 to 2020. The PAF program supported states and tribes to provide a wide range of services in settings such as high schools, community service centers, and/or institutions of higher education.

PAF services focused on five areas: (1) personal health (e.g., case management, prenatal care, health insurance enrollment support, behavioral health, violence prevention); (2) child health (e.g., home visiting, nutrition, access to healthcare, well-child visits); (3) education and employment (e.g., tutoring, academic support, assistance with college applications, employment and job-readiness training); (4) concrete supports (e.g., food, housing, transportation, baby supplies including diapers, cribs, car seats, etc.); and (5) parenting supports (e.g., parenting and healthy relationship education, child development education, child care). PAF grantees determined which areas to focus on to improve outcomes for EPY in the areas of health, parenting, education, and economic stability.

## Focus of the Case Study

This case study highlights how the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) used their PAF grant to serve EPY who had been involved with the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system, or both systems. Youth can be involved in these systems in a variety of ways. Involvement in the juvenile justice system could mean that youth are living in a detention center or another correctional facility or group home, or they may be on probation but living at home or on their own. Child welfare system involvement could mean that EPY are in or aging out of foster care or their child is in or at risk of being placed in foster care. Young people involved in the child welfare system, just as those involved in the juvenile justice system, face the additional challenge of navigating these systems and the implications for their role and relationships with their children. Furthermore, they often have experienced maltreatment or other trauma.<sup>1</sup> Such experiences put them and their families at greater risk of negative educational, employment, and behavioral outcomes.<sup>2,3</sup> System-involved youth tend to have higher rates of teen pregnancy and births; and they often face greater barriers to accessing health services, finding housing, and completing their education.



In serving the broader population of EPY as part of the Michigan Adolescent Pregnancy and Parenting Program (MI-APPP), MDHHS recognized the sizeable population of system-involved EPY in communities across the state whose needs were not being met. As part of their program offerings, they provided case management and supplemental services to EPY involved

in juvenile justice or the child welfare system. They also focused on young fathers who are often overlooked by existing programs, and they collaborated with a key community leader to deliver a curriculum specifically targeted toward young, incarcerated fathers to improve their relationships with their children.

This case study expands on the “Serving Expectant and Parenting Youth Involved with the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems” brief and provides a more in-depth exploration of the MI-APPP project.

## MI-APPP Case Study Methods

To understand the MI-APPP approach to serving system-involved youth, we conducted six semi-structured phone interviews with the grantee, partners, and select case managers across the communities served. While the original plan was to conduct in-depth site visits to better understand the approach to serving system-involved EPY, at the time of data collection, site visits were not possible due to COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions.

*\* See the “About the Study” text box toward the end of this case study for more information about the larger project.*

## Highlights of the Case Study

- MI-APPP took a strengths-based approach to case management for system-involved EPY, which prioritized relationships and rapport between case managers and youth.
- MI-APPP case managers learned how to navigate child welfare and juvenile justice systems to support system-involved EPY.
- MDHHS ensured that case managers received the ongoing training they needed to meet the specific needs of system-involved EPY.
- MI-APPP partnered with Cole Speaks to deliver the *Son to a Father* curriculum, which was specifically designed for incarcerated young fathers and genuinely resonated with the system-involved youth MI-APPP served.

## State and Community Context

Teen pregnancy and birth rates have been declining in Michigan as they have throughout the country. However, in 2019 almost 5,000 teens in Michigan gave birth, and almost 20% of these births were repeat births.<sup>4</sup> Within the state, MI-APPP served five primarily urban counties with among the highest teen pregnancy and repeat pregnancy rates: Berrien, Ingham, Kent, Saginaw, and Wayne counties. In addition to high teen pregnancy and repeat pregnancy rates, a high percentage of young fathers in these counties were involved in the juvenile justice system.

Before the PAF grant, dedicated services for teen parents across the state were lacking. Home visiting programs did serve expectant and parenting teens but without a focus on teen-specific needs; and they only served fathers as part of the family unit when the mothers were also present, but not as individuals.

## Description of Michigan’s PAF Grant

MDHHS created MI-APPP, funded by three consecutive PAF grants, to address adolescent parents’ needs in a developmentally appropriate way, and to strategically serve fathers and mothers. MDHHS provided subawards to entities



within Berrien, Ingham, Kent, Saginaw, and Wayne counties.<sup>a</sup> Key partners included county health departments, public school systems, regional education service agencies, a family services agency, and a direct service provider. An average of 151 EPY were served annually.

MI-APPP was primarily structured around case management plus supplemental services in each of these counties, with communities of practice to connect case managers and facilitate activities across the state. Although MDHHS oversaw and helped coordinate these activities, they were run locally by each county.

**Case management** began with a comprehensive baseline assessment to understand youth needs, and to establish goals and a treatment plan. Youth met with their case managers for at least two hour-long sessions monthly, plus additional contacts (up to daily in some cases) depending on needs and the level of engagement. Before COVID-19, case managers held meetings face-to-face in locations where youth were comfortable (e.g., their homes, restaurants, libraries, schools, parks). Each case manager typically had a case load of 20–25 youth. Their intent was to be a reliable, supportive person for these youth, providing encouragement, advice, and support as needed to meet their goals. This support covered areas such as job preparation, transportation, housing, and childcare.

### MI-APPP Targeted Outcomes:

- Reduce unplanned and repeat pregnancies
- Increase academic success
- Improve parent and child health
- Improve access to community networks and resources
- Increase adult connectedness
- Increase self-sufficiency

Each community provided **supplemental services**, based on identified community needs and youth requests. Youth did not have to participate in case management to participate in these supplemental services. Supplemental services had an educational component covering topics such as financial literacy, budgeting, parenting and co-parenting, healthy relationships, employment skills, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, housing, or cooking classes. There were opportunities for young families to socialize with each other through activities such as bowling nights or family dances. Supplemental services also provided opportunities for young mothers and fathers to connect with each other and with case managers. Together these supplemental services provided ways to increase social support and peer support by reducing the social isolation often experienced by EPY.

One supplemental service held annually across the five communities was the YouTHRIVE event, which brought together about 100 teen mothers and fathers from across the state and connected them through topical breakout sessions. This was an opportunity for them to learn from and connect with other young parents.



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*Not only do we share different knowledge, but it's also a way to connect and collaborate-for the kids to talk to each other. They exchange numbers, they talk about things, and become friends statewide. A kid from Saginaw may become friends with [a] kid from Lansing. They may know something different down there, or experience something different and can share that. –Case Manager*

<sup>a</sup> MDHHS also provided a subaward to Cole Speaks for delivery of a curriculum to young fathers in a detention center in Kent County.

MI-APPP strategically connected case managers across the project through **Communities of Practice**. A consultant oversaw and supported case managers across the five counties by providing assistance and guidance, and also facilitating connections between case managers and the activities offered in each county. Case managers shared ideas, successes, and challenges through monthly community-of-practice calls; yearly get-togethers; and regular emails, phone calls, and resource sharing. Making these connections fostered continuous learning and facilitated a more strategic, statewide approach to serving EPY.

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*That's the biggest positive of working with different agencies, the biggest positive with MI-APPP is the constant communication...even though we are in different cities. We are a connected family. Even though we are in different cities, we are constantly meeting with each other, at least quarterly. We also have group texts with each other going all the time. If something in their city is working for them, they can let us know what works for them. Same for us.... We are not just worried about what is happening in Saginaw, but in the whole State of Michigan. Because we work with each other so well, we are always in constant communication.... We do different events with each other. That is the biggest thing that I like with the MI-APPP program. Most places are just worried about their county, it is more of a bigger picture type thing. –Case Manager*

## Key Elements of Michigan's Approach to Serving System-Involved EPY

MI-APPP's focus on system-involved youth happened organically as MDHHS and their partners realized many of the EPY they were serving were involved in the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system, or both systems. Of the case managers we spoke with, most estimated that about 70–80% of the EPY they worked with were in one or both systems. Participant data from 2016 reflected that 50% of fathers served had been arrested and 40% were on parole.<sup>5</sup>

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*In our experience...we see that is pretty common if you are a foster care youth you're more likely to be someone who might become a teen parent. If you are involved in the juvenile justice system, once again, you're more likely [to become a teen parent] than [if you're] not [involved in the system]. – Consultant*

To serve system-involved youth more purposefully, MI-APPP capitalized on their individualized approach to case management. In addition, they decided to focus specifically on system-involved fathers, through partnering with Cole Speaks, an entity led by a Michigan-native who specializes in working with young, incarcerated fathers. Through this partnership, MI-APPP began serving expectant and parenting fathers in a juvenile detention facility in Kent County and delivering the *Son to a Father* curriculum.

### Individualized, Intensive Approach to Case Management

MI-APPP's individualized, intensive approach to case management was well-suited to serving system-involved EPY. The emphasis on relationships and rapport, the life experiences among case managers, as well as the strengths-based approach to case management became even more important when working with system-involved youth. In addition, case managers needed to be able to navigate the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system, or both systems, depending on the systems in which the EPY they served were involved. To support case managers in serving system-involved EPY, MDHHS ensured they received any necessary training.

### **MI-APPP case management for system-involved EPY prioritized relationships and rapport between case managers and youth, as well as the importance of case managers' lived experiences.**

Relationships and rapport between case managers and system-involved EPY were critical to building trust. System-involved EPY had been through and were going through adverse and challenging experiences. Based on these experiences, they were often distrustful or hesitant to build relationships with case managers. Case managers had to take the time and effort to engage in conversations, using techniques such as motivational interviewing, to create strong relationships and build trust intentionally and meaningfully. Regardless of specific goals or activities, a strong rapport and solid relationships were necessary pre-requisites for effective case management with system-involved EPY. With this population, especially, it was essential that case managers listened effectively and were non-judgmental, honest, patient, and supportive. Consistency and follow-through were also key to building strong relationships with system-involved EPY. Being reliable and trustworthy were particularly important when working with fathers involved in the juvenile justice system.

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*You don't overpromise or you'll lose credibility. The reality is if a dad comes to you and says he needs support or if he doesn't come to you but you build that relationship, you are engaged and make sure you follow through. Many of these fathers have experienced people not following through, not trusting systems, and not trusting that systems will listen to them. That is a challenge – take time to build that relationship and listen more. Most young men don't trust the system or others who say that they will listen to them and don't.*  
– Partner

MI-APPP relied on case managers who were well-integrated and connected with the community to foster rapport and build strong relationships. Case managers needed to be motivated to work with this population, and to become champions and advocates for the system-involved EPY they served. Case managers needed to be willing to let their guard down, open up to youth, and share their own life experiences. Case managers with similar lived experiences were key for serving system-involved EPY. Having a similar background and experience with systems helped to instill trust and strengthen relationships with system-involved EPY.

### **MI-APPP took a strengths-based approach to case management with system-involved EPY.**

MI-APPP acknowledged that many system-involved EPY did not have a support network, especially those in foster care. They noted that interactions with the system(s) could negatively affect youths' self-worth and confidence. Many of the authority figures system-involved youth interacted with approached them from a deficit-based or punitive perspective. For example, a probation officer (PO) might have focused on potentially punitive tasks such as drug testing, while MI-APPP case managers took a positive, strengths-based approach toward working with system-involved EPY. Their case management program fostered conversations between youth and case managers about setting goals and action steps to take toward achieving those goals. MI-APPP case managers found that creating and focusing on goals were especially critical for system-involved youth who were typically not otherwise focused on their future or often did not know what was next for them. System-involved EPY often struggled to think outside of their current circumstances. MI-APPP case managers helped youth identify what they wanted for their futures and worked with them on how to get there.

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*There are not enough people telling them to reach big, to reach past what you might think you can obtain. The hopes and dreams worksheet has a timeline with three things that have happened and three things you hope will happen in your future. If they don't say anything that is stretching, like maybe they want a job that pays minimum wage, which is a real dream in their confined space, we push [on] that. If you could go to college, would you, what are the barriers, could you side-step, could you start with online? Those elements open up sights to see past what is in front of you. If you are dealing with legal issues, foster care, if you are thinking about what you are going to eat and you have a new baby on the way, that is critical.” – Consultant*

**To serve system-involved EPY, MI-APPP case managers needed to navigate the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system, or both systems.**

MI-APPP case managers had to interact with systems to be able to speak with youth, advocate for them, and deliver or connect them with available services. It was challenging for case managers to determine where in detention centers they could meet with youth, ensure confidentiality, and where youth were also comfortable having confidential conversations.

EPY needed additional support in understanding and navigating systems' requirements and regulations. Case managers therefore sought accurate information on rules and regulations, and how to meet systems' requirements. If case managers understood the systems and their processes, they were better positioned to help youth.

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*A lot of our clients are not familiar or educated with the system. If they are dealing with CPS [child protective services] or something criminal, they need the additional support and we help out with navigating and walking through utilizing Legal Aid, helping with attorneys, or having contact with probation officers. We have lots of conversations with probation officers. Sometimes clients finish their community service and POs don't have documentation. If the client didn't have a supportive person, things could have gone a lot differently.*  
–Partner

The provision of case management also had to fit within systems' mandates and standards. Case managers often had to get permission for youth to attend events or confirm that the youth had been participating in case management and supplemental services. At times case management was required for system-involved youth, such as when a lawyer or judge made it mandatory for youth to participate in case management in order to expunge their record or reduce their probation time. Some youth involved with CPS had to participate in specific programs through their case management in order for their children to return home.

Case managers and their parent agencies formally and informally partnered with CPS workers, POs, and judges to better provide case management to system-involved youth. These partnerships built valuable connections. They also helped case managers increase their understanding of how the systems worked and gain insight into youths' specific circumstances. Additionally, referrals from these partners allowed MI-APPP to gain increased access to this population.

**MDHHS ensured case managers received training and support to serve system-involved EPY.**

Through communities of practice and regular calls and communication between case managers, they supported each other in how best to serve system-involved EPY. They asked each other and the consultant who oversaw all case managers for advice and support. In addition, when case managers requested support on a particular topic related to serving system-involved EPY, MDHHS helped organize training sessions. Cole Speaks provided training sessions specifically on working with and engaging fathers involved in the juvenile justice system.

**Focus on Fathers**

MI-APPP began to focus on fathers, and specifically on fathers in the juvenile justice system, when they noticed that these fathers constituted a large proportion of their caseloads.

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*“So we were looking at their [fathers' served] involvement in other system[s] and half of our dads... had been arrested, were on community probation, they had involvement in the...juvenile justice system alone. Moms are hovering about that same rate too, but we saw a need and you know with our equity lens focus we wanted to do something working with our fathers. So that's actually how the project kind of came to be – it was all need.” –MDHHS Staff*

In partnering with Cole Speaks, MI-APPP also discovered that fathers in the juvenile justice system were rarely asked if they were fathers. As a result, they were not offered parenting services or concrete support, and the needs of their families were not addressed. MI-APPP felt strongly that fathers should have the same services and support as mothers. They discussed how young fathers are often socialized to believe that they only need to help financially with their child, and there is a misperception that fathers do not want to be involved in other ways.

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*They also have children, these are young men, and I am helping them to get more engaged in their child's life. A lot of our young men want to be parents, but they just don't know how to be a parent.*

*–Case Manager*

MI-APPP put significant effort into thinking systematically about how to identify young system-involved fathers. In doing so they were able to get some court administrators to change their forms to identify whether young men are fathers. Systematic identification was an important step to better reach and serve this population.

### **MI-APPP partnered with Cole Speaks and delivered the *Son to a Father* curriculum to incarcerated young fathers.**

Cole Williams, CEO and founder of Cole Speaks, was a teen father himself and developed *Son to a Father* with his sons. They developed this curriculum in response to a gap they found in programming for young, incarcerated fathers, particularly African American fathers, which reflected their own experiences.

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*They have a lot of curriculums that sort of fit that population, but nothing that is really tailored to the African American young male experience. So when we developed the curriculum I was very intentional about creating material that looked like the dads that I worked with, because oftentimes the material that we were using through programs that work with dads didn't even look like the dads we were serving... Part of why this was developed is to capture some of the stories of young fathers of color, and put those in scenarios so they can hear and see their experiences in that narrative. –Cole Williams*

- **Curriculum Philosophy.** *Son to a Father* is a group-based, evidence-informed curriculum for young, incarcerated fathers, designed to improve their relationships with their children. The curriculum empowers fathers to become more involved and supportive, to better communicate with their children, to increase their self-awareness of how their own experiences impact their behaviors, and to develop a plan to reconnect with their families once they are released.<sup>6</sup>
- **Curriculum Structure and Content.** The curriculum includes 12 weekly lessons, but each lesson is intended to provide benefits on its own, as its targeted population is inherently transient. Among other lessons, the curriculum asks participants to develop a reproductive life plan. There are also sessions on healthy relationships, sexual health, parenting, and discipline. The curriculum also challenges gender norms, recognizing that fathers have an important role in their children's day-to-day lives, including preschool, medical checkups, and more. *Son to a Father* covers all aspects of parenting for these youth while they are still incarcerated.
- **Curriculum Strategies.** *Son to a Father* is a strengths-based curriculum that acknowledges and counters negative stereotypes about teen fathers. MI-APPP acknowledged that this strengths-based language was different than everything else these youth were hearing. Youth in detention centers were accustomed to blame and a much more punitive approach to interaction. In this way, they believed the curriculum met the unique needs of this population.

The curriculum uses a sports analogy to discuss sexual health as a way to engage the target audience.

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*Cole created this curriculum that has a lot of strength-based language and kind of addressing some of the biases that are out in society about fathering a child, or being a teen parent, and then just dads in general; the deadbeat dad or dads not wanting to be involved or dads not having emotions. –Consultant*

The curriculum encourages fathers to think about their own personal experiences in relation to being a parent. It stresses the importance of thinking about how they see themselves, their own fathers, and how their children see them, allowing them to identify any parallels in experiences and behaviors. This aspect of the curriculum includes much self-reflection and self-awareness. The curriculum developer explained that this can be an emotional experience for young fathers, but that it encourages them to really think about their role as fathers.



*Cole Williams and his son delivering Son to a Father.*  
[www.colespeaks.com](http://www.colespeaks.com)

**MI-APPP Implementation.** As part of MI-APPP, Cole Speaks implemented the curriculum in a detention center in Kent County and in communities to adult fathers on probation. When fathers were released from detention centers, they could continue with the curriculum in their communities. Other counties implemented the curriculum as part of their supplemental services.

**MI-APPP Training.** MI-APPP used a train-the-trainer model for Cole Speaks to train facilitators across targeted counties in Michigan. The two-day training included the facilitator guide and participant workbooks, and it included role plays and feedback on best practices. The training emphasized that facilitators needed to understand their own biases and how they perceived fatherhood and young men of color, as personal biases would impact the way they teach the curriculum. Much of the training was focused on equity and inclusion; facilitators needed to be intentional in understanding other cultures and communities.

*Son to a Father* resonated with system-involved EPY that MI-APPP served. MI-APPP found that young fathers really enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to connect with other young fathers. Case managers also found the curriculum to be extremely helpful for this population. Offering a curriculum designed specifically for incarcerated young fathers really impacted and engaged these youth, even the otherwise hardest-to-reach and serve youth. These youth had not seen something designed specifically for them before.

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*“I saw how engaging the curriculum can be, particularly for the hardest to reach and serve. One was in and out of juvie when he was younger. He’s older now, and I have never seen him that involved or [appear] like he was having fun with any other activity. That was huge.”–Case Manager*

### MI-APPP Response to COVID-19

Like other PAF grantees, MI-APPP had to adapt their approach when the COVID-19 pandemic and related shutdowns hit their communities in 2020. Cole Speaks quickly pivoted to provide *Son to a Father* online and worked with detention centers to help youth connect to their families over Zoom. Facilitators across MI-APPP’s targeted counties had been trained in delivering *Son to a Father* and were ready to deliver the curriculum, but they had to pause while they moved the curriculum to an online format within the detention centers. Their goal was for trained facilitators to be able to hold curriculum sessions virtually.

Shutdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic also affected how MI-APPP served system-involved youth more broadly. They found case management to be a valuable tool for navigating the pandemic, and case managers began conducting their sessions with youth by phone or videoconference. While case managers were successful in connecting with youth and engaging youth in this way, they found



benefits and drawbacks to providing case management virtually. In some ways, youth were more accessible since many venues were closed and everyone initially was staying home. Checking in by phone or video conference removed the barrier of travel time, and using technology was not an issue as most youth were quite tech-savvy. Most EPY had phones they could use and if they did not have minutes on that phone, local internet providers gave free internet access for a length of time to youth enrolled in school.

MI-APPP also found virtual case management to be more efficient and cost-effective, allowing them to reach more youth. Alternatively, they found that conducting case management virtually removed the personal connections they relied on in their work. Case managers were also accustomed to supporting youth in other ways such as helping them with transportation or getting a driver's license, or walking them through applications, which became more difficult when they were not together in-person.

Additionally, case managers supported youth in dealing with pandemic-related challenges. They worked to ensure basic needs of youth were met and occasionally dropped off items for the youth. Case managers realized they were serving more homeless youth, so they checked in with the youth to determine their needs and shared resources to provide support. The COVID-19 pandemic caused additional stress for these youth and exacerbated existing challenges such as unemployment. Case managers also found they were getting more texts about food during pandemic shutdowns.

Although MI-APPP also switched to virtual supplemental services, they were limited in what they could offer. These services had been crucial in providing opportunities for youth to connect and interact, and it was a major challenge to implement services virtually. MI-APPP had planned for a YouTHRIVE event to bring youth across the counties together to introduce them to college, give them a tour of a college campus, and introduce them to other trade or military colleges, but they had to cancel this event due to COVID-19.

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*We do a lot of family events or gatherings.... Since COVID, it stopped everything that we usually do to interact with young parents. –Case Manager*

## Summary

MDHHS' PAF grant activities, or the MI-APPP, consisted of case management, supplemental services, and communities of practice among case managers. In serving EPY, the grantee and their partners discovered that a large share of this target population was involved in the juvenile justice system, the child welfare system, or both systems. Accordingly, MI-APPP began to target their services to better serve system-involved youth. They capitalized on their individualized approach to case management to better serve this population, and they partnered with a curriculum developer and Michigan native who specialized in working with young, incarcerated fathers. Through this partnership, MI-APPP began delivering the *Son to a Father* curriculum to incarcerated young fathers. Despite interruptions due to COVID-19, MI-APPP remained dedicated to serving system-involved EPY to help improve outcomes for these youth and their families.

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## About the Study

HHS/OPA contracted Abt Associates to identify successful strategies and lessons learned from the Pregnancy Assistance Fund grant program (see <https://opa.hhs.gov/research-evaluation/pregnancy-assistance-fund-paf-program-evaluations/evaluation-key-strategies>). The study produced six topical briefs and corresponding in-depth case studies. The six topics were identified from a review of grantee documents and input from OPA staff. They reflect the range of approaches PAF grantees took to best serve EPY needs. The topics are (1) serving system-involved (justice or child welfare) youth; (2) serving youth in Tribal communities; (3) serving youth in rural communities; (4) cross-sector partnerships; (5) policy and systems-level strategies; and (6) strategies for improving educational outcomes. For each topic, the study selected grantees from the pool of 26 grantees funded in the most recent cohort (2018-2020) and in at least one other cohort.

The briefs and case studies draw from review of grantee documents, performance data, and semi-structured phone interviews with grantee and grantee partner staff. Note that due to COVID-19 restrictions, case studies could not include the originally planned site visits.

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This case study and other related products are available at <https://opa.hhs.gov/research-evaluation/pregnancy-assistance-fund-paf-program-evaluations/evaluation-key-strategies>



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