

# Older Foster Youth and The Cost of Doing Nothing

The Case for I Pour Life's Development Intervention Model:  
LifeStrengths in a Post COVID World

Contact Info:  
Julie Higgins, CEO  
[julie@ipourlife.org](mailto:julie@ipourlife.org)  
417-849-7451

## **Terms:**

### **At-Risk Youth**

*Young adults aged 15-24 who display factors indicative of potential negative outcomes, including: foster care, incarceration, or generational poverty. Negative outcomes common among this population include unemployment, education dropout, early pregnancy, lower income earnings, and adult incarceration.*

### **Education Progress**

*Involves continuation or completion of high school, GED, or other equivalent. If the youth has already completed high school, steps toward advancement in technical school or higher education.*

### **LifeCoach**

*I Pour Life certified coaches that work one-on-one with at-risk youth and implement LifeStrengths curriculum through motivational interviewing.*

### **LifeStrengths**

*I Pour Life's positive youth development program that focuses on developing at-risk youth for self-sufficient adulthood through strengths identification and positive relationships. The program incorporates one-on-one coaching, workbook completion, peer connection, and community involvement.*

### **Positive Youth Development (PYD)**

*PYD is an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths.<sup>1</sup>*

### **Social Capital**

*The network of social interactions and relationships that exist within communities or individuals. These relationships foster advancement and opportunity.*

### **Strengths-Based**

*The LifeStrengths curriculum brilliantly integrates the Gallup CliftonStrengths into each section of the workbook, adapting the program to highlight the individual strengths of the participant and meet their unique needs. Each youth takes the CliftonStrengths assessment upon starting the program, allowing them to identify with the positive qualities they possess, rather than negative ones.*

### **Workforce Readiness**

*LifeStrengths considers workforce readiness to include four out of the following factors: completion of the LifeStrengths workbook, stable housing, financial literacy, connectedness, and social capital.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Youth.gov <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development>

## **Overview**

### **Title**

Older Foster Youth and The Cost of Doing Nothing:  
The Case for I Pour Life's Development Intervention Model: LifeStrengths

### **General Objective**

By implementing a positive youth development system for foster care and other at-risk Missouri youth, I Pour Life will provide proven financial analysis with supportive measurable outcomes which in turn will offer cost savings to the State of Missouri of \$1.1 million every year.

### **Area of Impact**

State of Missouri, Regions: Southwest, Southeast, and Kansas City

### **Narrative**

I Pour Life's positive youth development program targets a critical foster care age group of 15-24 years. Through one-on-one life coaching, at-risk youth escape social isolation and become economically self-sufficient by increasing their social wealth and gaining Social Capital.

The economic cost of poor outcomes from 240 foster youth to the State of Missouri is \$2.5 million every year without development intervention from I Pour Life. By investing \$870 thousand in I Pour Life's LifeStrengths program, the economic cost can be reduced by \$2 Million to \$500 thousand. Through this reduction in the cost of poor outcomes, I Pour Life can save the State of Missouri \$1.1 million after its investment, a 45% return on investment.

The LifeStrengths program has been operating in Southwest Missouri for over 5 years and has served 363 youth during this time with a proven track record of helping youth launch into self-sufficiency. To date, the program has saved its community over \$6.5 million dollars and produced a 63% return on investment.

### **Closing**

The State of Missouri has the opportunity to become a state and national catalyst for the development of older foster care youth through a continued partnership with I Pour Life. Through this partnership, the state of Missouri will take part in an innovative approach to *LifeCoaching* older foster and at-risk youth to a place of economic self-sufficiency and exemplify that preventative investments are effective and impactful in reducing state budgets.

### **Presented by**

Julie Higgins, CEO  
417-849-7451

## **Executive Summary**

### **Problem**

The Coronavirus pandemic has magnified the challenges that older foster youth face on a regular basis. Under normal circumstances, inadequate development programs for foster youth aged 15+ have left just over 5,000 youth in the State of Missouri isolated from the social connections and resources necessary to launch into self-sufficient adulthood. Risk factors present in this demographic include: high unemployment rates, delayed and lower education achievement, high incarceration rates, low income earnings, unstable housing, and the absence of social support. These risk-factors are compounded by the far reaching impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The next 12 months will be critical to ensuring that Missouri's older foster youth avoid a lifetime of unnecessary individual and societal costs.

### **Solution**

By providing positive youth development services to older foster and at-risk youth through a weekly one-on-one virtual coaching model, older foster and at-risk youth are able to receive development coaching which impacts the physical, mental, and economic capabilities as well while providing a cost effective solution to society.

### **History**

In 2011, I Pour Life became a Missouri incorporation with a 501(c)(3) federal registration of 27-3482070. In 2014, a case study to provide Social Capital through life coaching was performed with an at-risk youth, showing proof of theory that positive youth development and one-on-one life coaching can impact the development of an at-risk youth. In 2016 and after further development of LifeStrengths, Dr. Michael Stout, Ph.D, an associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, at Missouri State University, performed a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the LifeStrengths program in collaboration with I Pour Life. Missouri State University's Center for Community Engagement (CCE) conducted a pre and post assessment of youth outcomes based on indicators that would measure the impact of I Pour Life's life coaching program. An objective of the CCE's research, as well as I Pour Life's efforts, was to discover and enhance the levels of hope, purpose, confidence, and social cohesion among the life strength's participants. The outcome from this study and encouragement from the participants was the catalyst to further develop LifeStrengths, focusing on at-risk youth, ages 15-24, who are in government care, socially isolated, and/or trapped in generational poverty. We believe anyone can thrive. Yet without the right opportunities, influence, and support system, many stop believing in themselves.

### *How We're Different*

The I Pour Life LifeStrengths Development System is an evidence based, positive youth development program for at-risk youth who are exiting the foster care system, young adult offenders, or living in generational poverty. These populations have consistently been identified as the most at-risk population group for incarceration, education dropouts, unemployment, lower income earnings, homelessness, and teenage pregnancy compared to their peers. LifeStrengths uses a specialized method of coaching built on the principles of positive youth development. The emphasis on development is derived from the 3 stages of poverty alleviation:

- Relief: Aid from immediate crisis
- Rehabilitation: Rebuilding to normal or stabilized living

- Development: Advancement to self-sufficiency and personal achievement<sup>2</sup>

The LifeStrengths' positive youth development methodology is specific to the development phase of poverty alleviation and prevention. LifeCoaches interact with at-risk youth on a weekly basis with the focus on instilling personal ownership and accountability for decisions made while maintaining a positive, future focused approach. This development approach emphasizes employment, education progress, financial literacy, stable and healthy living, and Social Capital in order to advance a youth towards self-sufficiency.

The curriculum and LifeCoach training equip staff to strictly provide development coaching and no other relief or rehabilitation services. I Pour Life calls this a "hand up, not a hand out." Any youth relief or rehabilitation needs are resourced by the LifeCoach through community partnerships and existing services provided by local agencies in an integrated model of social service delivery. When no such resources exist, the LifeCoach works with local community members to find a community driven solution for the youth. To date, I Pour Life has coached approximately 150 youth in-care with a total of 300 at-risk youth to date.

#### *Recognition and Credibility*

In early 2018, the State of Missouri Children's Division reached out to I Pour Life, asking if they would contract to LifeCoach youth in their care. To date, I Pour Life has coached approximately 150 youth in state care with a total of 300 at-risk youth. The LifeStrengths program was recognized by the United States Children's Bureau in 2019 as being one of only two organizations in the United States providing an evidenced based approach to positive youth development with an emphasis on building Social Capital. This unique distinction provides an immediate comparative advantage over other services being provided to at-risk youth in Missouri. In 2019, I Pour Life was invited by America's Promise Alliance to take part in their National Youth Summit held at Facebook Headquarters to discuss growth and development among youth.

#### **Criteria for Evaluation**

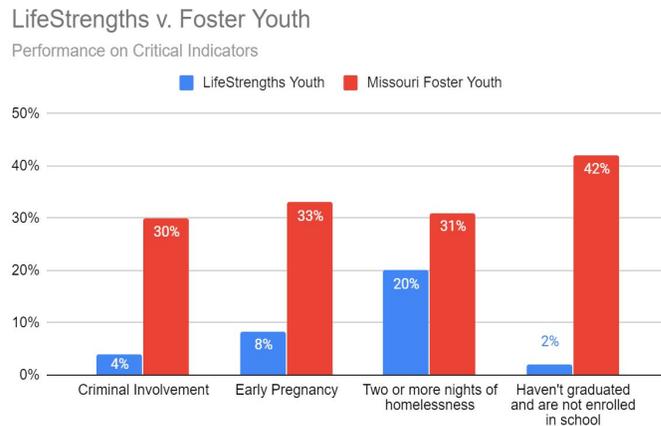
The primary risk factors for youth aging out of foster care are: incarceration, unemployment, lower income earnings, early pregnancy, delayed high school completion, and homelessness. The LifeStrengths program is an evidence based intervention for these risk factors and evaluates impact by measuring youth development outcomes. These outcomes are Workforce Readiness, Education Progress, Sustainable Living, Financial Literacy Development, and Social Capital Development. The outcomes were selected because of their impact on the high risk factors prevalent in youth aging out of foster care. Workforce Readiness is a key factor in reducing unemployment with an emphasis on gaining and retaining a job. Education Progress includes completion of a high school degree and the competitive advantage that gives a youth in employability and increased income potential. Sustainable Living measures the consistency of housing, possession of important documents, transportation and other areas that affect a youth's ability to maintain sustainable living. Financial Literacy Development focuses on a youth's advancement in comprehending and making financial decisions that lead to self-sufficiency. Social Capital Development measures a youth's growth in developing a sense of community and building positive stable relationships.

Each outcome measured is based on monthly tracking and cumulative impact through personal milestones achieved by LifeStrengths youth. The goal of the program is to achieve 80% or higher impact in each metric. Youth achieving success in these outcomes have demonstrated positive behavior changes, increased wellbeing, and self-sufficient milestones. I Pour Life is currently seeing a positive community impact rate of 77.6%. While this number is slightly below the stated goal, it is accounting for youth that have recently entered the LifeStrengths program and does not account for any future outcomes that youth will achieve. It is reasonable to assume that this number will increase with time based on past performance of youth who have completed the LifeStrengths year long program.

---

<sup>2</sup>Fikkert and Corbett, *When Helping Hurts*, 2009

A recent survey of 50 LifeStrengths youth participants illustrates the impact of this model on the high risk outcomes associated with youth aging out of foster care. The survey questions presented youth with the opportunity to self report on criminal involvement, early pregnancy, homelessness, and education status. Only 4% of youth reported criminal involvement compared to 30% for foster youth in the United States and Missouri. Early pregnancy was reported at 8.3% for LifeStrengths youth compared to 33% for the national average for foster youth and 4.3% for the general population. Youth experiencing homelessness was reported at 20% compared to 31% for Missouri foster youth. Youth education outcomes were reported by LifeStrengths youth at 2% who haven't graduated and are not enrolled in school versus 42% of Missouri foster youth.



The LifeStrengths youth survey results reveal that the majority of the survey participants are reporting either positive advancement or avoidance of high risk outcomes. Of the youth surveyed, 56% have already attained their high school diploma and the majority of the rest are enrolled in school. Thus we are seeing the greatest impact in education outcomes. When education is achieved, employment opportunities improve. The LifeStrengths program is also adding opportunities for participants who have completed six months of LifeCoaching to find their voice among peers in Youth Innovation Groups (YIG).

Youth will have the opportunity to elect to be a part of the YIG which focuses on peer-to-peer relationship building as well as community mapping. I Pour Life has realized that the experiences of youth are invaluable in creating systemic change for at-risk youth across the State. In this group setting youth will develop Social Capital with their peers and identify areas of improvement for youth policy and practices. Youth representatives will then have the opportunity to bring their findings to a Community Innovation Lab (CIL) which consists of leaders from, business, government, and other community change agents. The CIL will give recommendations and help devise solutions to advance youth interests and create positive change.

### **Economic Analysis**

Nationally, the outcomes of foster youth are having a negative economic impact on communities across the country with an annual cost to the U.S. economy of \$4.1 B.<sup>3</sup> A large portion of this cost falls directly on the shoulders of taxpayers across the country in the form of government subsidy for youth as they transition into adulthood and beyond.

<sup>3</sup> Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, *Future Savings: The Economic Potential of Successful Transitions from Foster Care to Adulthood*, Table 1, 5.

### **State of Missouri:**

The following calculations were made using as many statistics provided by the state of Missouri as possible. However, in areas where adequate information was not provided, a national statistic was used to calculate an approximate cost of negative outcomes for youth aging out of foster care in Missouri.

A sample of 240 foster youth has been used to calculate the impact of adverse outcomes in the following section. The number 240 was chosen because it is the number of youth that I Pour Life has the capacity to serve. The Cost of Doing Nothing column illustrates the costs associated with the negative outcomes that foster youth achieve without development intervention.

### **Education Statistics Explained**

In the state of Missouri, simply graduating from high school results in a median yearly wage increase of \$10,000 versus those who do not complete a high school degree.<sup>4</sup> Youth who age out of foster care graduate at a significantly lower rate than their peers. While the state's overall graduation rate is 90.5%, the national average for foster youth is only 58%<sup>5</sup>. As a result of this significantly lower graduation rate the economic cost to Missouri communities is \$784,134. This cost to communities is significantly reduced through the LifeStrengths program to \$156,827.

<b>Education:</b>	<b>Cost of Doing Nothing</b>
Foster Youth Graduation Rate	58%
Overall State Graduation Rate	90.50%
Dropouts	78
<b>Total Economic Cost/Year*</b>	<b>\$784,134</b>

\*Economic cost calculated from the difference of median earnings of individuals with and without a highschool degree (\$30,000 compared to \$20,000 respectively). Additionally, the economic cost factor includes State tax revenue lost as a result of decreased earnings using the 2019 Missouri State income tax tables.

### **Early Pregnancy Statistics**

Early Pregnancy is defined as pregnancy prior to being married or graduating high school. Half of the young women in foster care become pregnant between the ages of 15 and 19. Roughly two thirds of those pregnancies are carried to term.<sup>6</sup> This results in a 33% rate of childbearing by foster youth compared to 4.3% amongst the general population. There would be 34 fewer births among this demographic if foster youth in this sample had children at the rate of the general population.<sup>7</sup>

<b>Too Early Pregnancies:</b>	<b>Cost of Doing Nothing</b>
Rate of Childbearing by Foster Youth	33%
Rate of Childbearing by General Population (Up to age 20)	4.30%
Estimated # of Early Pregnancies	34
<b>Total Economic Cost/Year*</b>	<b>\$346,627</b>

<sup>4</sup> Missouri Educational Attainment and Income 2018

<sup>5</sup> National Youth in Transition Database 2011

<sup>6</sup> Pregnancy and Childbearing among Young Adults who Experienced Foster Care- NCBI

<sup>7</sup> Missouri CD Annual Reports FY 2015-2019 Table 32

\*Child Cost/Year was calculated using the 2015 USDA report that indicates the cost to raise a child from 0-17 is \$174,690 or \$10,276/year for a low income family.

**Incarceration Calculations Explanatory**

According to the “Midwest Study,” 30% of Foster Youth reported being incarcerated while the rate of incarceration for the general population is 0.86%.<sup>8</sup> Statistically, 70 of the 240 foster youth will be incarcerated without development services. With LifeStrengths intervention this number drops to 14 and reduces the cost to society from \$1.3 million to \$270 thousand.

<b>Incarceration:</b>	Cost of Doing Nothing
Foster Youth who will be incarcerated	30%
General Population who will be incarcerated	0.86%
Criminal Involvement	70
<b>Incarceration Cost/Year*</b>	<b>\$1,364,009</b>

\*The cost/inmate in Missouri Department of Corrections annual report is \$19,503.<sup>9</sup>

**Economic Cost of Poor Outcomes**

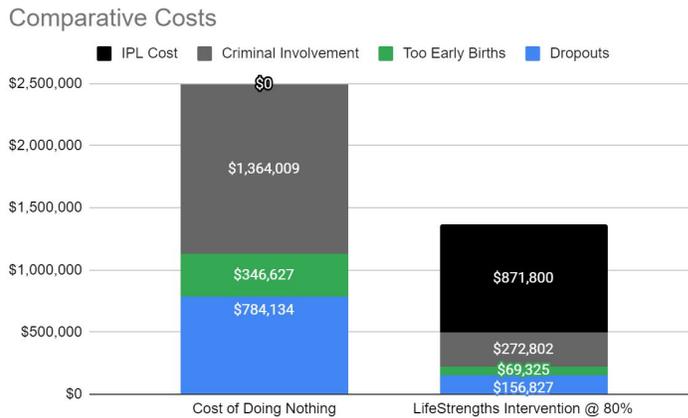
In many cases, youth age-out at the age of 18 without the education, economic skills, and social capital necessary to become self-sufficient adults. Without these skills, negative outcomes such as delayed high school achievement, depressed wages, early pregnancy, and incarceration become a reality. The total economic cost of these outcomes totals nearly \$2.5 million annually.

<b>Yearly Costs of Foster Care Outcomes</b>	
Economic Cost of Doing Nothing	\$2,494,770
Economic Cost After LifeStrengths	\$498,954
Cost of LifeStrengths Program	\$871,800
<b>Net Savings to Community</b>	<b>\$1,124,016</b>

The graph below shows the combined cost of negative outcomes vs. LifeStrengths intervention and the resulting reduction in negative outcomes. It will cost \$871,800 to provide the LifeStrengths program to 240 youth for one year. An 80% success rate is attainable given historical program outcomes. This success results in a two million dollar reduction in the cost of negative outcomes every year. Taking into account the initial investment, a community will save \$1.1 million in the first year, which is a 45% return on its investment.

<sup>8</sup> Prison Policy Initiative - Missouri Profile

<sup>9</sup> Calculated by using adult institution cost divided by the number of inmates. Missouri DoC Annual Report FY 2016.



By maintaining the status quo, the cycle is perpetuated and economic losses continue to grow. I Pour Life offers a unique solution that breaks the mold and provides long term economic savings to communities around the State of Missouri.

### **COVID-19 Impact**

These economic outcomes for former foster youth do not take into account the significant toll that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on older foster youth populations. The safety measures taken by businesses and governments have left the foster youth population high and dry when it comes to education, employment, and mental health.

Education impacts have been felt across the country when schools were forced to move instruction online or cancel classes altogether. For many kids this was a minor inconvenience, as many had access to computers and at-home support structures required to continue learning in a digital environment. However, foster youth often have limited computer access and lack the presence of an invested adult to encourage them in continuing courses digitally. This lack of access and support throws up a tremendous barrier to education progress that is vital to future successes. For many of the youth in this demographic, these barriers will be a primary reason for dropping out.

Older foster youth are also disproportionately impacted by the employment crisis brought on by the pandemic. Nationally, 48%<sup>10</sup> of foster youth reported that their employment has been negatively impacted in a way that restricted their income. This is especially concerning considering the precarious situation that this population was in prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond the financial impact of lost jobs and reduced hours, foster youth rely on employment to help them build Social Capital. Social Capital refers to the connections, networks, and relationships among people and value that arises from human interaction. This positive interaction produces information, emotional, or financial support, and/or other resources necessary for a self-sufficient life. In fact, 33% reported that they wished that they had access to other people to help them navigate this difficult time<sup>11</sup>. When foster youth don't have access to these positive relationships through work, they either find themselves isolated or will find social interaction through negative relationships with high-risk individuals. These high-risk relationships often derail the development process.

<sup>10</sup> The Field Center, The Experiences of Foster Youth During COVID-19

<sup>11</sup> The Field Center, The Experiences of Foster Youth During COVID-19

The mental health implications are far reaching and hard to quantify but, according to the Field Center at the University of Pennsylvania, 56% of foster youth reported clinically significant levels of depression or anxiety. Some services that youth would typically access for counseling or other services are still open virtually but again, many youth have access issues. Social isolation has undoubtedly played a significant role in the feelings of anxiety and depression.

### **I Pour Life's COVID-19 Response:**

Although traditional one-on-one LifeCoaching requires a different approach during COVID-19 with stay at home guidelines, I Pour Life immediately leveraged expertise in the youth engagement space by innovatively shifting all coaching services to a mobile video conferencing model, which also allows funds to be maximized and more youth to be reached. The access issue has been mitigated by the ability of LifeStrengths coaching sessions to take place via mobile platforms which the majority of youth served by I Pour Life have access to. This model includes a multi-step strategy building youth engagement throughout the week and ending with highly productive positive development sessions. In almost each instance, coaching has continued at the same rate or greater than it had been prior to the virtual model implementation. Rather than decrease services or delay them as a result of COVID-19, the LifeStrengths programming for youth development grew in demand as other services stopped or were limited.

This approach will continue to allow the I Pour Life LifeStrengths program to serve more youth during the stay at home timeframe while maintaining outcomes for development. While many entities struggled to either communicate with youth or have engaging conversation, LifeStrengths coaches produced a 4% increase in coaching session engagement and significant increases in daily and weekly touch points. LifeStrengths program participation experienced a 70% increase in March through June over the 3 non-COVID-19 months preceding, which demonstrates a great need for these services among foster youth. During virtual LifeCoaching, 96 youth have achieved workforce readiness and 69 youth have achieved education progress.

By being available on all of the platforms that youth communicate on, I Pour Life was able to provide the positive interactions and social capital that they were missing out on as a result of the pandemic. These interactions combined with I Pour Life's proprietary LifeStrengths curriculum has helped advance youth on the path to self-sufficiency.

### **FAQ:**

#### **Why is preventive development funding for older foster youth so important?**

I Pour Life targets an area that is often overlooked. With only 2% of national spending going towards programs and services for older youth, this is an area in desperate need of attention. I Pour Life takes the principles of the federal Family First Prevention Services Act of prioritizing stable, permanent relationships as a driving factor in the health, well-being, and overall success of children and youth in foster care and applies it to older youth that would otherwise be left to fall through the cracks. Mary Lee Allen, Children's Defense Fund stated, "These youth are often referred to as invisible children."

#### **Why not fund preventative family services or adoption?**

While employing preventive services to keep families together is ideal, for many of the youth that I Pour Life coaches, by the age of 15 only three percent of youth will be reunified with their family or adopted. Older youth who have experienced repeated attempts to be reunified with their families have stated that relatives are still experiencing the cyclical behaviors of drug addiction, government dependence, and abuse. Nevertheless, the impact that I Pour Life is having on changing systematic familial dynamics of poverty, domestic abuse, and

incarcerations is significant. I Pour Life coaches all foster youth, and particularly pregnant youth, on healthy familial dynamics with a “no age out” policy.

### **Why doesn't I Pour Life provide housing?**

Research shows three ways of poverty alleviation: relief, rehabilitation, and development. I Pour Life believes that for social services to be successful, there has to be an integrated model of all three. Although I Pour Life partners with organizations and agencies who provide relief and rehabilitation service, we strictly focus on the economic development and self-sufficiency of older foster and at-risk youth. The heart of I Pour Life's development process is to propel at-risk youth forward onto a path of self-reliance and security.

### **Can virtual coaching due to COVID-19 replace vital human interaction?**

Virtual coaching will never completely replace the value of in-person interaction but it is a valuable tool during the pandemic to maintain contact with youth and continue to have coaching conversations. In some ways, LifeCoaches have reported that connection is made easier because the conversation is taking place on a platform where the youth is already comfortable. I Pour Life has actually seen an uptick in coaching session conversations because of the virtual model.

### **Recommendations**

Funding LifeStrengths development coaching for older foster and at-risk youth is a fiscally responsible choice that has a proven track record of 77% of youth achieving successful outcomes. The program costs just over 870 thousand dollars and will see 240 youth directly impacted each year.

### **Conclusion**

The cost of doing nothing versus preventative investment far outweighs the benefits for both the State of Missouri and foster youth aging out. The reduction in prison sentencing, teenage pregnancies, higher rate of high school graduates, and economic impact on the community and individual shows the benefit of preventative funding.

We are asking state policymakers and private citizens to advocate for programs providing Social Capital measures through positive youth development. The impact of this proposed investment and advocacy of foster care would result in a reduction of youth aging into adult government subsidies, incarceration or prison sentencing, educational dropouts, and teenage pregnancies.

As stated by U.S. Senator Roy Blunt, Missouri, “Early intervention and family support are two primary areas where having better policies and resources in place would go a long way toward improving outcomes for adults who were in the foster care system.” Changing the status quo can impact the future of an older foster care youth.

The LifeStrengths program offers a solution that diverges from the status quo and will provide the solutions necessary to create positive change in the outcomes of older foster youth.