Generational Opportunities to Achieve Long-Term Success (GOALS)
Phase I Final Research Brief

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Formative Evaluation Research Brief

Overview
The Generational Opportunities to Achieve Long-Term Success (GOALS) program provides comprehensive, residentially-based services to Arapahoe County families experiencing homelessness. Using a 2Gen framework, GOALS was initiated and developed collaboratively by Arapahoe County Human Services and Family Tree and is implemented through a partnership with Family Tree. Family Tree is a nonprofit organization operating multiple programs for adults, children, and families and is responsible for implementing GOALS, while Arapahoe County Human Services provides key funding, technical assistance, and support for the process and outcome evaluation of the program.

The mission of GOALS is to effectively help families living in poverty gain stable housing, economic security, and family well-being. While providing these services, GOALS seeks to add to the body of evidence on the effectiveness of a 2Gen approach to helping vulnerable families escape poverty. Toward this end, GOALS is conducting both formative (Phase I) and outcome (Phase II) evaluations. This research brief provides an overview of the findings of Phase I of the GOALS implementation, which took place from January 2019 to June 2020, and includes a description of the process of conceiving, planning, and launching the program, and the experiences of the first families served. Information on the Phase I families — their lived experiences, characteristics, and engagement at GOALS — is described. A synthesis of feedback from residents and key management team stakeholders on early program development is provided, concluding with lessons learned from Phase I.

GOALS and 2Gen Approaches
The GOALS program model incorporates two-generation (2Gen) approaches by providing services to parents, children, and families. 2Gen services connect both parents and children to achieve outcomes in the following domains: physical and mental health, early childhood education, postsecondary and employment pathways, economic assets, and social capital. Through intensive, wrap-around residential services, GOALS utilizes motivational interviewing techniques to conduct comprehensive case management work with families to identify needs and resources, access services from partner agencies, secure permanent housing, and create a plan for economic stability and family well-being. Central to GOALS implementation is the eventual co-location at GOALS of key service providers, including workforce programs and an early childhood education center.

Formative Evaluation Methods
GOALS formative efforts included convening a leadership team of local agencies to assess needs and services available in the community for homeless families and conducting focus groups with unstably housed families who provided important feedback and suggestions for potential services. A permanent facility was secured, and the preliminary service model was developed. The Center for Policy Research (CPR) was contracted to provide technical assistance and conduct the evaluation research.
The formative evaluation had two main goals:

1) Develop, implement, and manualize the GOALS intervention at a residential services campus that supports homeless and unstably housed families in addressing barriers to economic security in an effort to break the cycle of poverty using a 2Gen framework.

2) Test components of the GOALS intervention to ensure service needs of families are being met while achieving outcomes related to housing stability, economic security, and family well-being.

The research questions for the formative evaluation include:

- What value did convening a leadership team of community stakeholders bring to the formation of the GOALS program and its 2Gen framework?
- What are the perceptions of members of the management team and other key stakeholders on the process thus far in conceiving, planning, and implementing the GOALS program?
- Were referring partners able to identify, refer, and enroll families from the target population in the GOALS program?
- What are the characteristics and lived experiences of GOALS Phase I families?
- What has been the experience of GOALS clients served during the “soft opening” of the launch of the GOALS program?
- What lessons can be learned from the early stages of GOALS development and implementation?

The evaluation focused on documenting and collecting information from the following sources:

- Interviews with program architects, project management and staff, and key stakeholders.
- Screening tool, developed to identify the target population
- Baseline survey, designed to collect demographic and background information on the families housing, education, employment, and health and well-being
- 2Gen Index, designed to establish measures of 2Gen outcomes including family well-being, economic security, and children’s development of their potential
- Case Management records
- Service records
- Exit survey and Follow-up interviews, designed to gain Phase I family perspectives on participation in the GOALS program and program exit information.

Feedback from Key Stakeholders

CPR gathered feedback from GOALS program architects, planners, and implementers on the development and priorities for the program. Researchers conducted telephone and video interviews in April 2021 with several key stakeholders. The stakeholder interviewees included core members of the project management team, project management staff, and staff at GOALS. The focus of the stakeholder interviews was on GOALS’ application of a 2Gen framework, the roles and values of the leadership and management teams in launching the GOALS program, the qualities of the core partnership between Arapahoe County Human Services and Family Tree, the
blended service model with other partner service agencies, and lessons learned during the
development of the program. All the interviewees, with the exception of two Family Tree staff
members, have been involved in program planning since very early in the process.

Insights and Themes from Stakeholder Interviews
Several themes emerged from the interviews with the stakeholders:

1. Aspirations for the impact GOALS will eventually have with families remain high among
   the informants, particularly related to the co-location of services and the application of
   the 2Gen framework for services.

2. Establishing a leadership team of Arapahoe County service providers and other
   stakeholders was very useful to creating the service model and building support for the
   GOALS concept, producing concrete outcomes in securing resources.

3. The extensive collaboration between Arapahoe County Human Service and Family Tree
   effectively leveraged both organizations’ resources and experiences but also presented
   challenges. Clarifying expectations of each partner at the early stages of the project would
   have been helpful and will continue to be useful going forward.

4. Operating a 24-hour residential facility for multiple families experiencing homelessness is
   already an inherently challenging endeavor. This, combined with the application of the
   2Gen framework, the demands of a formal evaluation, and the new partnership structure
   between Arapahoe County Human Services and Family Tree, resulted in new and
   increased expectations for Family Tree and program implementation. It is important to
   acknowledge the full impact of these expectations on Family Tree and align human and
   financial resources accordingly. Evaluating and aligning human resources for onsite
   coordination and implementation further enhanced Family Tree’s ability to effectively
   meet these diverse expectations.

5. Many of the informants expressed a high tolerance for the ambiguity
   inherent to starting a new project and
   understanding that the program
   model is evolving and growing.
   Recognizing the pilot nature of this
   project, informants suggested that
   while there were things they could
   have done differently, the trial-and-
   error process of rolling out the
   program has been and will continue
   to be useful.
Phase I Families and Services

Phase I of the evaluation ran from January 2019 to June 2020 and served seven families, consisting of 10 adults and 22 children, from both single- and two-parent families. The families came to GOALS with many challenging lived experiences common to poverty, including very low-income levels, homelessness, limited education, as well as barriers such as felony convictions, substance abuse, engagement with child welfare, and mental health concerns. The first families began their residence at GOALS in July 2019. Families resided at GOALS for an average of nine months. Unfortunately, the implementation of GOALS Phase I was heavily impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic. GOALS operated continuously during this period, but internal and external services were curtailed, and social distancing protocols interfered with residents’ interactions with staff and one another. The Phase I families exited GOALS either to their own homes, to live with family members, or to transitional housing.

Although Phase I families identified economic assets as their primary concern, they focused on a variety of issues during their stay at GOALS. Mental health concerns were present for most families. While most families found employment during their time at GOALS, these jobs were often short-lived. Family reunification was another top priority, as three of the families had a child or children in out-of-home placement. GOALS staff worked with families in order to help them overcome barriers, such as the lack of a valid driver’s license and other transportation issues. GOALS helped three families secure childcare.

Case management notes and direct feedback from residents illustrated some challenges within GOALS. The most common challenges were related to communal living, such as residents not doing their fair share of chores, behavior infractions and conflict, and house rules or practices that seemed unfair.

According to the families, GOALS was most helpful in supporting the education of their children, securing childcare, and meeting the needs of both parents and children. Former residents spoke very highly of the assistance provided by their case managers (also referred to as ‘Navigators’). Like the key management stakeholders, they also expressed optimism about GOALS’ potential positive impact for families. The regular Family Voice meetings and family activities hosted at GOALS were appreciated and were missed when COVID restrictions moved meetings to a virtual platform and limited in-person services.

Ultimately, most residents felt like their circumstances after their residence at GOALS were about the same as before, and that the services provided were not especially helpful in achieving results long-term. Unfortunately, much of these residents’ engagement and service participation was limited during the pandemic, which likely significantly contributed to their overall program perceptions. Given the limitations imposed on in-person service delivery during the pandemic, it is difficult to draw conclusions on the potential impacts and efficacy of GOALS; moreover it is possible their circumstances would have taken a turn for the worse had they not been involved in
GOALS. In addition, many of the Phase I families faced complex and difficult challenges, some of which went beyond GOALS purpose and capacity.

Summary of Lessons Learned
While limited due to COVID, the services and practices implemented by GOALS align well with the hallmarks of the 2Gen framework. Key lessons learned from Phase I include:

- **Optimism about GOALS 2Gen potential remains high.** Both GOALS leadership and the residents who participated in Phase 1 implementation are optimistic about the potential positive impact from GOALS’ 2Gen, wrap-around residential program model. Continuing to revisit GOALS’ shared mission, vision, and goals with all levels of program staff, partner agencies, and residents will help translate this optimism into effective programming.

- **Community Leadership Team has positive impact.** Early engagement from community partners in the conception and implementation of GOALS positively impacted GOALS development. The shared mission and vision, from the top down across key partner agencies, was critical to rolling out a complex multi-agency collaborative program and to securing important funding, leading to a robust service model.

- **The partnership between Arapahoe County Human Services and Family Tree is positively evolving.** The active partnership between Arapahoe County Human Services and Family Tree in the development and implementation of GOALS has leveraged the assets of two very different entities. While this partnership has drawn on the respective resources and strengths of each agency, differing expectations and ways of operating created some challenges. Continued attention to the components of effective partnerships, including shared expectations and clear communication, should continue to be a focus moving forward.

- **Human resources were adjusted and re-aligned with heightened expectations for 2Gen implementation and for meeting the needs of residents.** The design and launch of GOALS posed numerous challenges that sometimes conflicted with the rigorous demands of a 2Gen framework and rigorous evaluation, despite high collaboration efforts. For a 2Gen framework to be successful, it was evident early on that staff must have the traits to work with families facing serious challenges and be fully trained on a trauma-informed approach to case management. Additionally, evaluation efforts require extensive data collection. These, combined with the inherent challenges of operating a residential program made considerable demands on the GOALS staff, and may have contributed to high turnover in key positions. Additional human resources in program management became necessary to meet both the requirements of the GOALS program.

- **Phase I families experienced complex barriers, and additional screening criteria was needed to better identify families who fit the service model of GOALS.** The lived experiences and barriers of the resident families during GOALS Phase I were challenging and difficult to effectively address. While this was anticipated, efforts to serve families demonstrated the need for policies and procedures for resident enrollment and staff development. Some
families faced significant substance abuse issues and safety risks that the GOALS program was not designed for or able to provide. Additionally, some of families had open active child welfare cases that demanded the focus of families and may have distracted from GOALS other economic security and family well-being priorities. Through the CQI process, CPR added additional screening criteria to further refine the target population of families enrolled in GOALS to further define the population best targeted for the GOALS program.

- **Program performance measures require consistent data collection and updates to enhance applicability.** Developing and adapting measures to report on performance is important to ensuring the families being served are receiving the services they need. Some of the tools that were designed to track and report on key outcomes were not widely completed as intended, requiring additional support from the evaluation team. CPR also created an ongoing CQI process to review data monthly, which is critical to ensuring the program is on track to achieve desired outcomes. Data-driven decision-making is dependent upon consistent and complete data collection and documentation in the GOALS Connect management information system.

- **Family Voice meetings and family activities build social capital.** Encouraging and supporting participant voice in the development and ongoing service delivery model ensures the program is responsive to family needs while supporting engagement. Regular Family Voice meetings serve the dual purpose of soliciting residents’ thoughts and opinions while also building a social network among residents.

- **Onsite services will enhance program delivery and client satisfaction.** The promise of onsite services did not come to fruition as planned during Phase I, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and stay-at-home orders. Phase I families hoped for more support from staff when looking for housing and accessing services, in addition to more support in building community while living in the GOALS facility. With the planned move in of onsite service providers, Phase II will be able to test the effects of these onsite service providers.

- **The GOALS model integrates 2Gen hallmarks and components, which well positions implementation in Phase II.** During the second phase of operations, GOALS will have the opportunity to coordinate and integrate 2Gen features into its programing more deeply.

- **COVID-19 impacts were significant.** The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted program service delivery and was felt by Phase I families. A major feature of the GOALS model, co-location of services with other programs on the GOALS campus, was unable to be realized in Phase I.

The Phase II evaluation of the GOALS program is currently underway. This impact evaluation will compare long-term outcomes for families who participate in the GOALS program against a comparison group of similar families who did not receive services at GOALS. This rigorous research design will begin to build evidence to support the GOALS intervention in breaking the multi-generational cycle of poverty among homeless and unstably housed families.