

March 2024

Workforce Connections

Evaluation Report



Career Learning Center
— of the Black Hills

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John T. Vucurevich Foundation

About the Program

Career Learning Center of the Black Hills (CLCBH), a project of Black Hills Special Services Cooperative (BHSSC) received a grant from the John T. Vucurevich Foundation (JTVF) to increase the rate of adult education students entering into and succeeding in postsecondary education programs. This educational attainment ultimately leads to self-sufficient family wages and creates a workforce development pipeline to meet high-demand and high-wage jobs in the Rapid City area. This program is called **Workforce Connections**.

All students served will achieve/receive the following within a two-year period:

- High School Equivalency Diploma (GED)
- Intensive career counseling
- Workforce and soft skills training (10 hours)
- Financial literacy classes (8 hours)
- At least one college level credit or a pertinent, national industry-recognized credential



Career Learning Center
— of the Black Hills

About the Program

1. Workforce Connections pairs each client with a mentor. Clients are referred to the program from other Black Hills Special Services Cooperative programs or other community partners.
2. Mentors help clients identify their educational and personal goals.
3. Mentors provide consistent support, crisis funding, and warm hand offs to other community partners that can meet the needs of their clients as they work towards their goals.
4. Partners participate in the Workforce Connections Coalition, a quarterly meeting of agency representatives that celebrate wins, facilitate referrals, and problem solve together.

Coalition Members

Housing

- **OneHeart:** Assistance with transitional housing.
- **Cornerstone Mission Men's Shelter:** Referrals for housing
- **Cornerstone Mission Women and Children's Shelter:** Referrals for housing
- **Western South Dakota Community Action Program:** Emergency housing assistance, legal documentation, and community classes.
- **Pennington County Housing and Redevelopment:** Housing vouchers, rental assistance.
- **Volunteers of America:** Emergency housing assistance.
- **McKinney Vento Program:** Referrals regarding homelessness with children and their parents.

Health

- **Complete Health:** Referrals for medical and mental health needs.
- **Oyate Health Center:** Referrals for medical and mental health needs.
- **West River Mental Health:** Referrals for mental health needs.
- **City County Drug and Alcohol Program:** Referrals for substance abuse.

Coalition Members

Children/Child Care

- **Youth and Family Services:** Childcare needs, classes, and case management.
- **Rural American Initiatives:** Childcare needs.
- **Starting Strong:** Childcare/Preschool needs.
- **BrightStart:** Nurse home visiting.
- **SD Department of Social Services:** Economic assistance and childcare assistance.

Education

- **Catholic Social Services:** Referrals to the Uplifting Parents and counseling services.
- **South Dakota Family Engagement Center:** Referrals for educational and literacy support of parents and students.
- **Black Hills State University:** Referrals between the program and the university.
- **Western Dakota Tech:** Referrals between the program and technical college.
- **SD Mines:** referrals between the program and the university.
- **West River Health Education Center (AHEC):** Financial support for individuals pursuing healthcare careers.

Coalition Members

Other Basic Needs

- **South Dakota Department of Labor:** Financial support for GED® preparation, post-secondary education and training support, and job placement services.
- **Pennington County Health and Human Services:** Emergency assistance.
- **SHIFT Garage:** For assistance with car repair and car donations.
- **Feeding South Dakota:** Food assistance.
- **Fork Real Community Café:** Family literacy events and food assistance.
- **Love Inc.:** Referrals for Life Inc. classes.
- **Elevate Rapid City:** Workforce Development.
- **Consumer Credit Counseling of the Black Hills:** Referrals for financial counseling and financial literacy training.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation:** Refer clients with disabilities to them for services.
- **Driver's Education:** Paid client enrollment

Evaluation Methodology

Workforce Connections (WC) and the John T. Vucurevich Foundation developed an internal monitoring system to help staff and funders better evaluate how program interventions impact clients. The new internal monitoring system worked in conjunction with the Community Care Link data system and was used to monitor and visualize client success of the Workforce Connections (WC) program.

WC staff collects longitudinal client data across a number of indicators on the Crisis to Thrive Scale. Callie Tysdal, Communication Director at the John T. Vucurevich Foundation, provides data collection and formatting support. Callie also provides reports to WC staff and funders on an annual basis. This PowerPoint presents the third annual report for WC Staff and stakeholders.



Active Client Profile

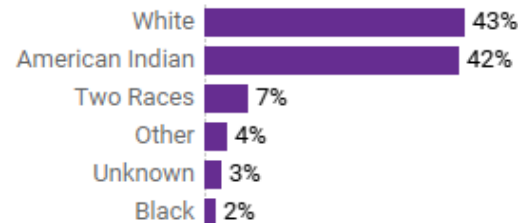
Workforce Connections served 110 individual clients from September 2020 to December 2023.

These clients bring with them a diverse set of life experiences, personal strengths, and challenges. These clients, however, are united by low to no household incomes, not one being over \$37,000 annually.

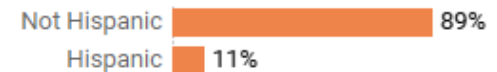
Gender



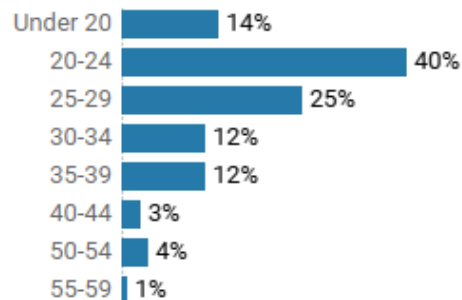
Race



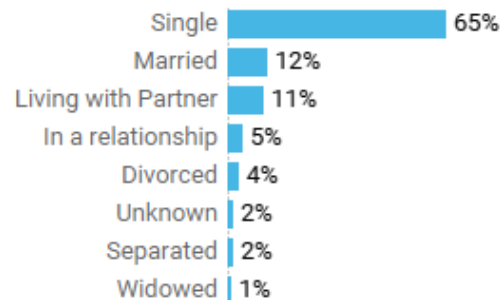
Ethnicity



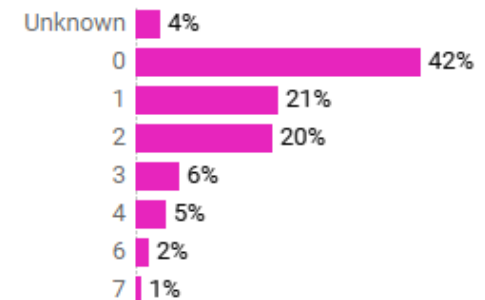
Age



Relationship Status

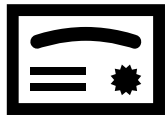


Children in Household



Client Profile

Of the 110 clients served during this time period:



66 did not have a high school diploma



48 were first generation higher education students



37 did not have a computer at home



13 did not have internet at home



24 had felony convictions

Income

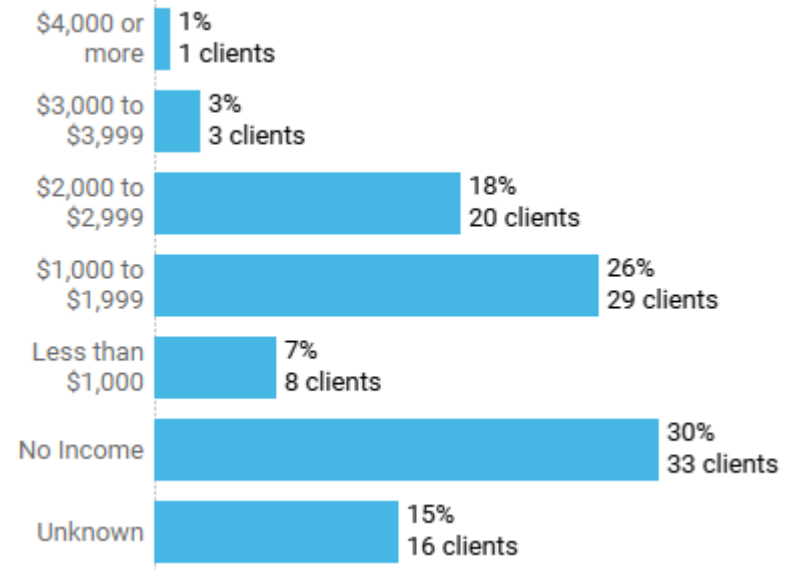
Almost all clients lack the income needed to make ends meet for themselves and their families. 1 out have 3 have no income.

There is an observable increase in income for many who complete program tasks, even if they are not graduated from the program.

Income at First Appointment



Income at Last Appointment



Personal Goals

96 clients had educational goals. Mentors provided needed support, cheerleading, and accountability to help them meet their personal goals.

Educational goals include:

- Earning a GED or high school diploma
- Apply for college
- Complete FAFSA/Apply for scholarships

55 clients had employment goals. These goals often build upon the educational successes the client has while in the program.

57 clients had other goals. These goals help clients obtain further stability in their home life or better equip them for the workforce. Other goals include:

- Become more financially stable
- Obtain driver's license
- Obtain housing
- Pardon on drug charge
- Obtain childcare or childcare assistance
- Obtain custody of children
- Improve mental health
- Obtain service dog
- Complete Recovery program
- Obtain a vehicle

Crisis to Thrive Scale

The Pathways to Prosperity Crisis to Thrive Matrix is an adapted version of the [2010 Snohomish County Self-Sufficiency Matrix](#). This scale was initially modified by Callie Tysdal, then of Benchmark Data Labs and now of the John T. Vucurevich Foundation, and Tracy Palecek for the Prosperity Initiative Client monitoring system. Clients were ranked on a scale of 1 to 10 in 5 areas: childcare, education, employment, housing, and transportation. Each data point was supported further qualitative explanation of why the client was ranked thus. Client data was tracked each time a mentor interacted with the client.

The following is an analysis of clients served during their **first and last meeting** with their mentor. As the program monitoring continues, longitudinal comparisons will be made for each client.

Childcare

The following is the Crisis to Thrive scale for childcare. Mentors noted their client's status after each meeting and shared additional context in a comment section.

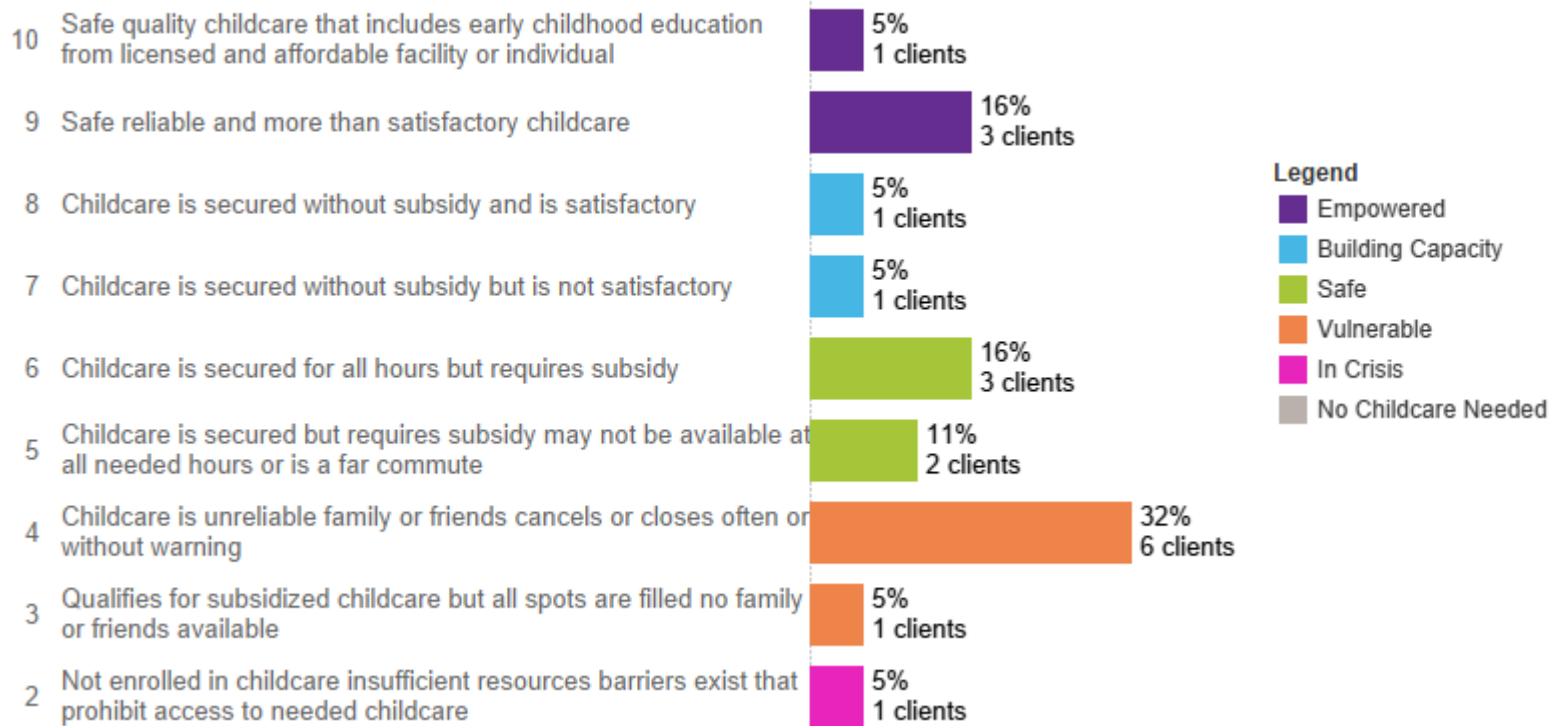
Scale	Rank	Explanation
In Crisis	1	Child is too young/ineligible for childcare
	2	Not enrolled in childcare, insufficient resources, barriers exist that prohibit access to needed childcare
Vulnerable	3	Qualifies for subsidized childcare but all spots are filled, no family or friends available
	4	Childcare is unreliable (family or friends) cancels or closes often or without warning
Safe	5	Childcare is secured but requires subsidy, may not be available at all needed hours or is a far commute
	6	Childcare is secured for all hours, but requires subsidy
Building Capacity	7	Childcare is secured without subsidy but is not satisfactory
	8	Childcare is secured without subsidy and is satisfactory
Empowered	9	Safe, reliable, and more than satisfactory childcare
	10	Safe, quality childcare that includes early childhood education from licensed and affordable facility or individual
Not applicable	11	This client does not have children
	12	This client had children but does not have custody at this time
	13	This client has children but they do not need childcare (child is old enough to take care of themselves)

Childcare

Only 25% of clients needed child care.

Those with affordable and reliable child care often accessed it through programs like OneHeart, Head Start, or Jump Start. Less supported clients often relied on friends and family for care.

First Recorded Childcare Score





5% of clients experienced improvement in child care

Clients face a national crisis where childcare is increasingly difficult to find, even for those with access to income-based programs like Head Start.

Access is further complicated by a lack of reliable transportation and employment barriers.

Transportation

The following is the Crisis to Thrive scale for transportation. Mentors noted their client's status after each meeting and shared additional context in a comment section.

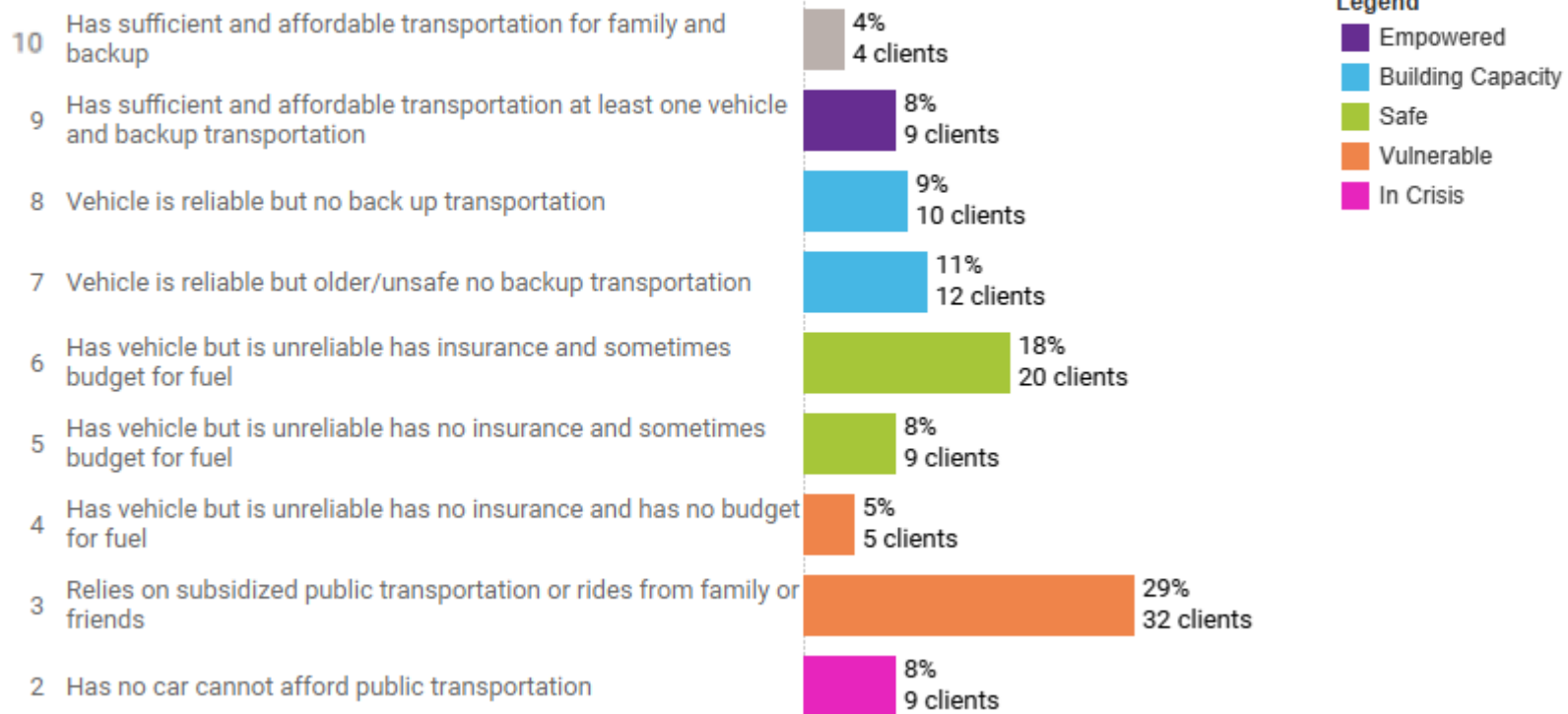
Scale	Rank	Explanation
In Crisis	1	Has no car, too far from public transportation/doesn't serve needed locations
	2	Has no car, cannot afford public transportation
Vulnerable	3	Relies on subsidized public transportation or rides from family or friends
	4	Has vehicle but is unreliable, has no insurance, and has no budget for fuel
Safe	5	Has vehicle but is unreliable, has no insurance, and sometimes budget for fuel
	6	Has vehicle but is unreliable, has insurance, and sometimes budget for fuel
Building Capacity	7	Vehicle is reliable but older/unsafe, no back-up transportation
	8	Vehicle is reliable, but no back up transportation
Empowered	9	Has sufficient and affordable transportation, at least one vehicle, and backup transportation
	10	Has sufficient and affordable transportation for family and backup

Transportation

The majority of clients did not have reliable personal transportation.

Most people without reliable access to a car or fuel rely on family, friends, and Lyft. Some rely on transportation options offered by other programs like OneHeart.

First Recorded Transportation Score





**16% of clients
made gains in
personal
transportation**

Transportation is a persistent barrier.

The cost to purchase, maintain, insure, and fuel a personal vehicle is out of reach for most clients.

Housing

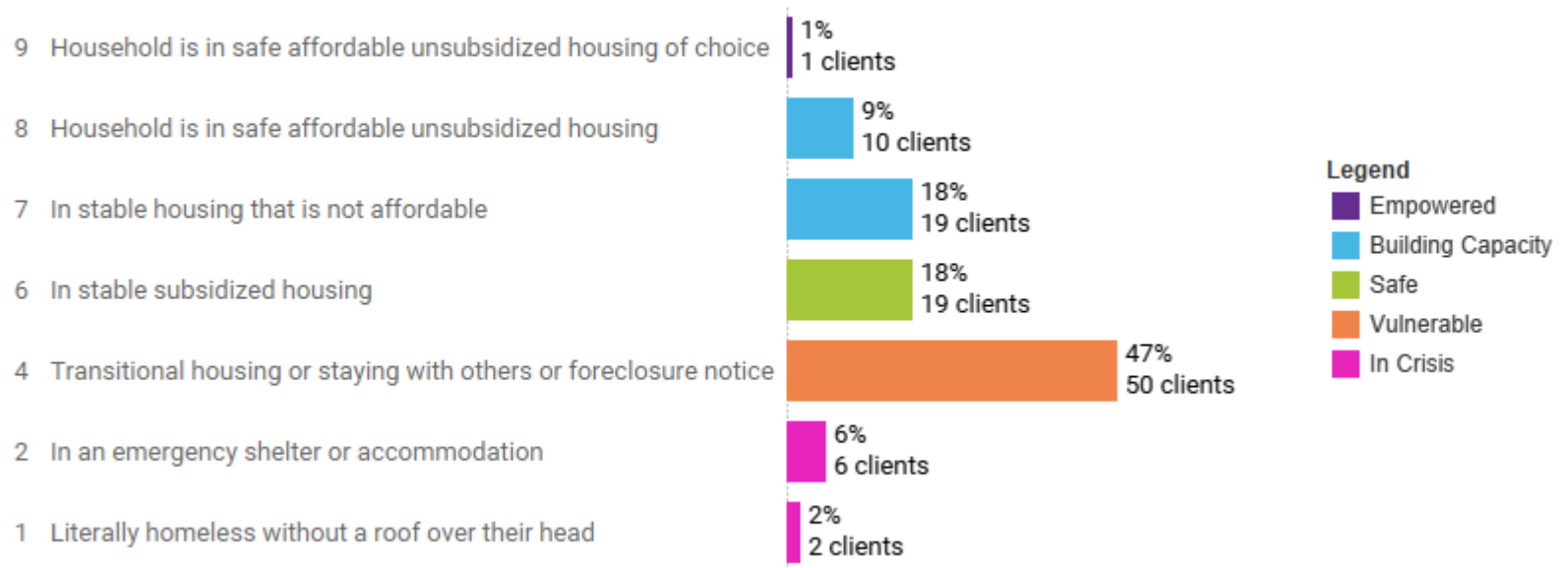
The following is the Crisis to Thrive scale for housing. Mentors noted their client's status after each meeting and shared additional context in a comment section.

Scale	Rank	Explanation
In Crisis	1	Literally homeless, without a roof over their head
	2	In an emergency shelter or accommodation
Vulnerable	3	Legal threat of eviction or immediate foreclosure
	4	Transitional housing, or staying with others, or foreclosure notice
Safe	5	Receiving temporary rent/mortgage subsidy or has received one in the past 3 months
	6	In stable, subsidized housing
Building Capacity	7	In stable housing (rent or own) that is not affordable (more than 30% income on housing costs)
	8	Household is in safe, affordable, unsubsidized housing
Empowered	9	Household is in safe, affordable, unsubsidized housing of choice
	10	Household is safe, affordable, and paid off

Housing

Though most clients were in some form of housing, 55% do not have their own home or apartment. Most clients live in intergenerational housing with extended family, friends, or romantic partners.

First Recorded Housing Score





10% of clients experienced improvement in their housing situation.

Only 6 clients (8%) were in housing they could afford on their own.

This trend is likely symptomatic of the local housing market that studies have shown does not have enough affordable housing and is increasingly expensive. Mentors also identified a need for transitional housing for those who had not been clean and sober for 90 days.

Education

The following is the Crisis to Thrive scale for educational attainment. Mentors noted their client's status after each meeting and shared additional context in a comment section.

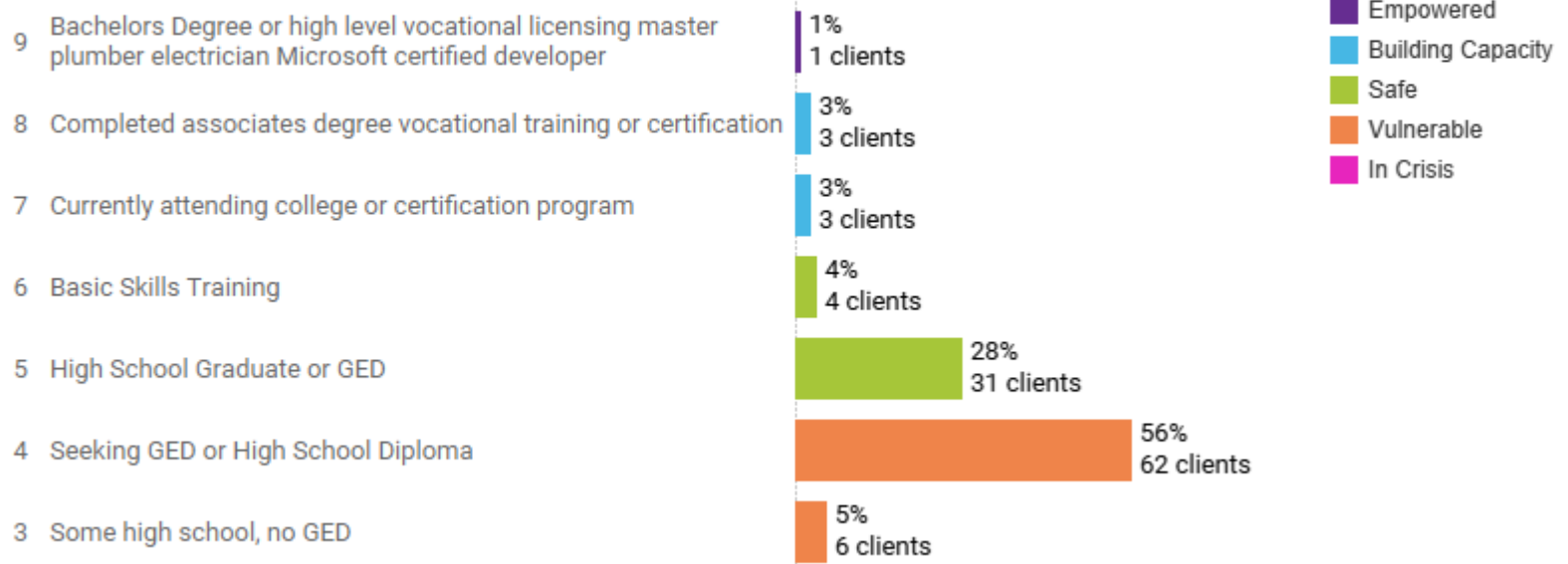
Scale	Rank	Explanation
In Crisis	1	Less than 8th grade education and/or limited reading/writing ability
	2	Less than 8th grade education, with ability to read/write
Vulnerable	3	Some high school, no GED
	4	Seeking GED or High School Diploma
Safe	5	High School Graduate or GED
	6	Basic Skills Training
Building Capacity	7	Currently attending college or certification program
	8	Completed associates degree, vocational training or certification
Empowered	9	Bachelor's Degree or high level vocational licensing (master plumber, electrician, Microsoft certified developer)
	10	Advanced degree or completed college and is employed in field of study

Education

The majority of clients lacked the necessary educational levels to earn a livable wage and secure benefits.

Educational attainment is a highly correlated to higher levels of income. Many WC clients sought higher levels of education required to secure more stable employment or pursue a career in their chosen field.

First Recorded Education Score



Education



3 out of every 5 clients did not graduate high school. The majority of these clients worked closely with mentors to get their GED or diploma.



Clients dropped out of high school for various reasons. They include to take care of siblings, poor grades, and mental health issues.



Mentors supported clients with over \$5,767 in education funding. This funding helped clients apply for school and secure school supplies including books, laptops, and exam fees.



**31% of clients
successfully
earned higher
levels of
education**

Workforce Connections helps clients achieve their educational goals.

26 out of 34 clients that improved entered with less than a high school diploma. All went on to seek their GED, with a handful going on to pursue basic skills training, certification programs, or even higher education.

Employment

The following is the Crisis to Thrive scale for employment. Mentors noted their client's status after each meeting and shared additional context in a comment section.

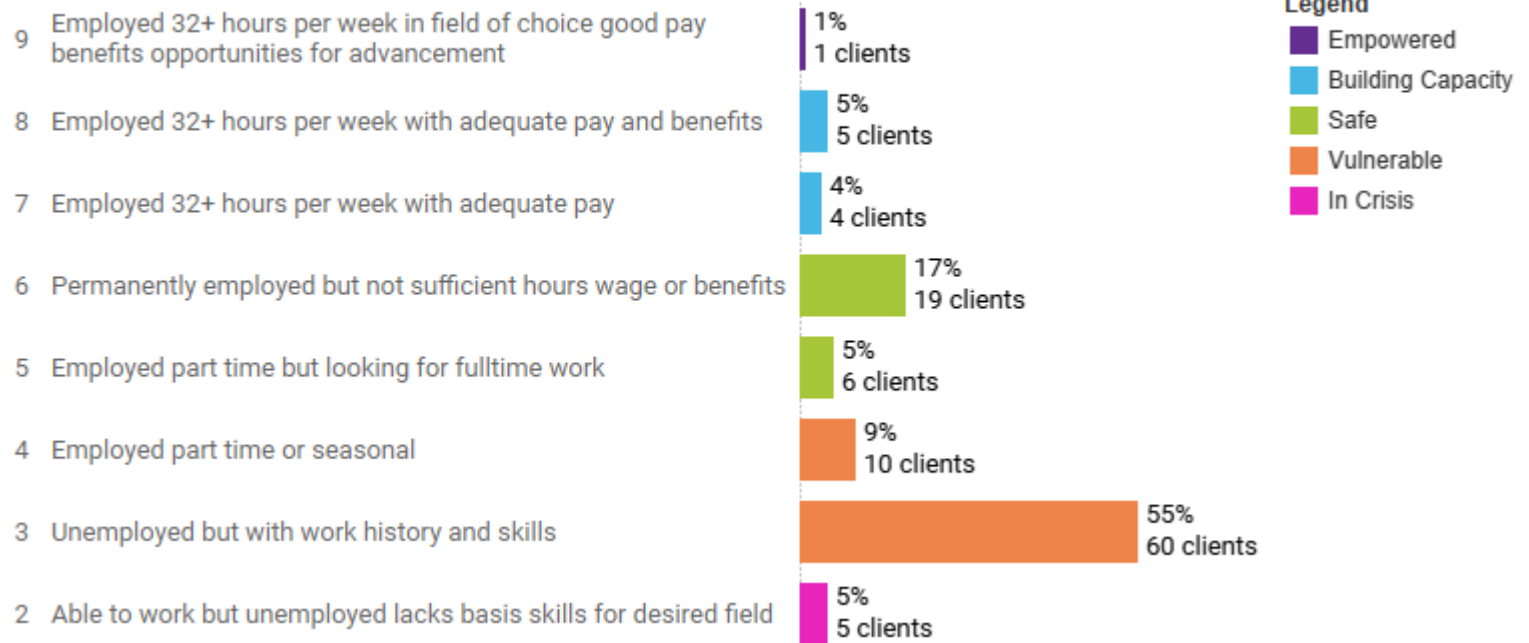
Scale	Rank	Explanation
In Crisis	1	Unable to work
	2	Able to work but unemployed, lacks basis skills for desired field
Vulnerable	3	Unemployed but with work history and skills
	4	Employed part time or seasonal
Safe	5	Employed part time but looking for fulltime work
	6	Permanently employed but not sufficient hours, wage, or benefits
Building Capacity	7	Employed 32+ hours per week with adequate pay
	8	Employed 32+ hours per week with adequate pay and benefits
Empowered	9	Employed 32+ hours per week in field of choice, good pay, benefits, opportunities for advancement
	10	Employed 32+ hours per week in field of choice with benefits opportunities for advancement, stable employer

Employment

Most clients were vulnerable or in crisis when it comes to employment.

Most clients previously held several retail or service jobs, most for less than a year.

First Recorded Employment Score



Employment



62 clients (57%) do not have full-time employment. Many of these clients have some work experience but need extra support to maintain employment stability while others are full-time students.



Only 10 clients held stable, full-time jobs. It is unlikely for most clients to attain stable, well-paid employment in a field of their choice without years of work on their educational attainment status.



Only 5 client had benefits through their job. Benefits provide employees long-term stability.



25% of clients made gains in employment

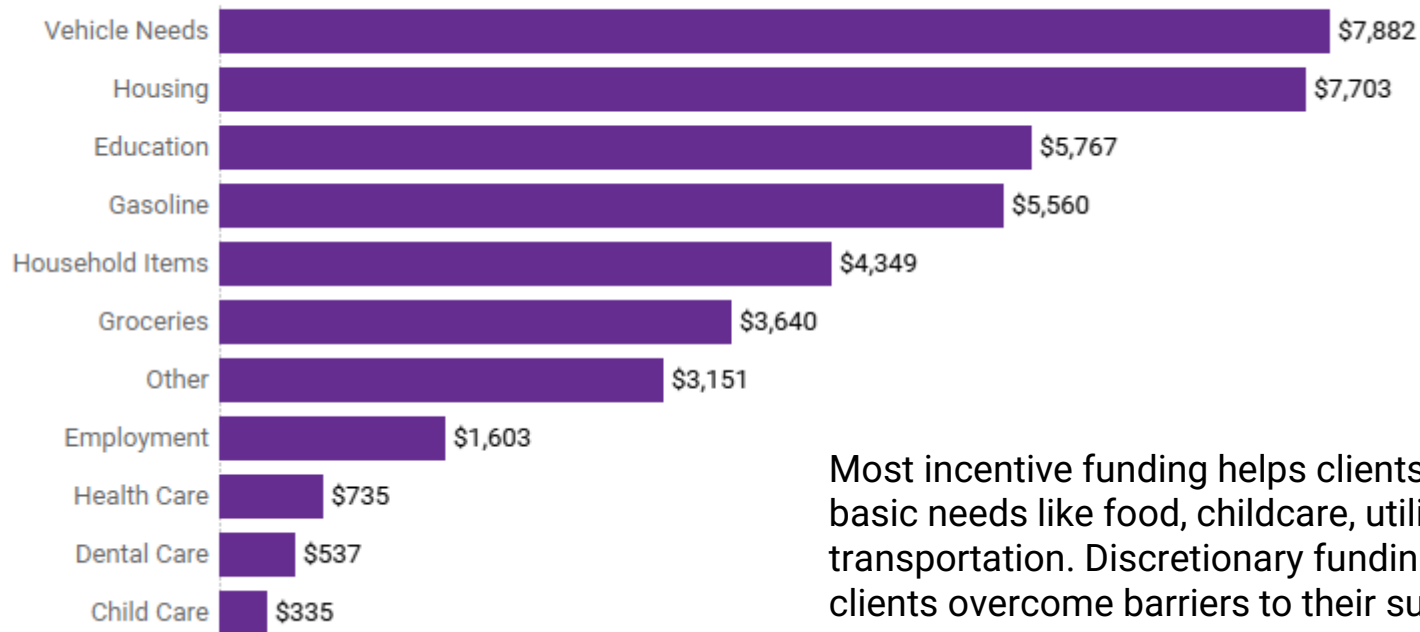
Even if employed, clients do not earn a livable wage for the region.

Client hourly wages range from \$11.67 to \$18.30 per hour. Though some clients found more hours or a higher wage, few have found stable, full-time positions. Some working on higher education goals forego employment to focus on their programs.

Discretionary Funding

Mentors distributed \$41,263 to 86 different clients. This funding is provided as both incentive funding and discretionary funding.

Incentive Funding



Most incentive funding helps clients meet basic needs like food, childcare, utilities and transportation. Discretionary funding helps clients overcome barriers to their success and defrays educational or legal expenses

Discretionary Funding



Mentors have doubled the value of incentive gift cards in the last three years from \$25 to \$50, especially for basic needs and those with families



“My clients use Walmart cards for toilet paper, dish soap, laundry detergent, diapers and feminine hygiene products. Things that SNAP does not cover.



Mentors also help clients meet other vital needs that many other programs cannot: cell phone minutes and gas cards. Though Rapid Ride is a good partner, the bus system does not currently have the reach, hours, or reliability clients need to continue their education or employment.

Partnerships



Workforce Connections maintains strong relationships with community partners and their clients directly benefit from this community collaboration. Mentors strongly encourage their clients to use other programs and encourage them to keep going back.



Mentors emphasize that their clients lack social capital, especially healthy supportive relationships or family in the community. Mentors fill this gap with consistent encouragement, assistance with problem-solving, and warm-hand offs to other supports.

Client Success



Meet Jan

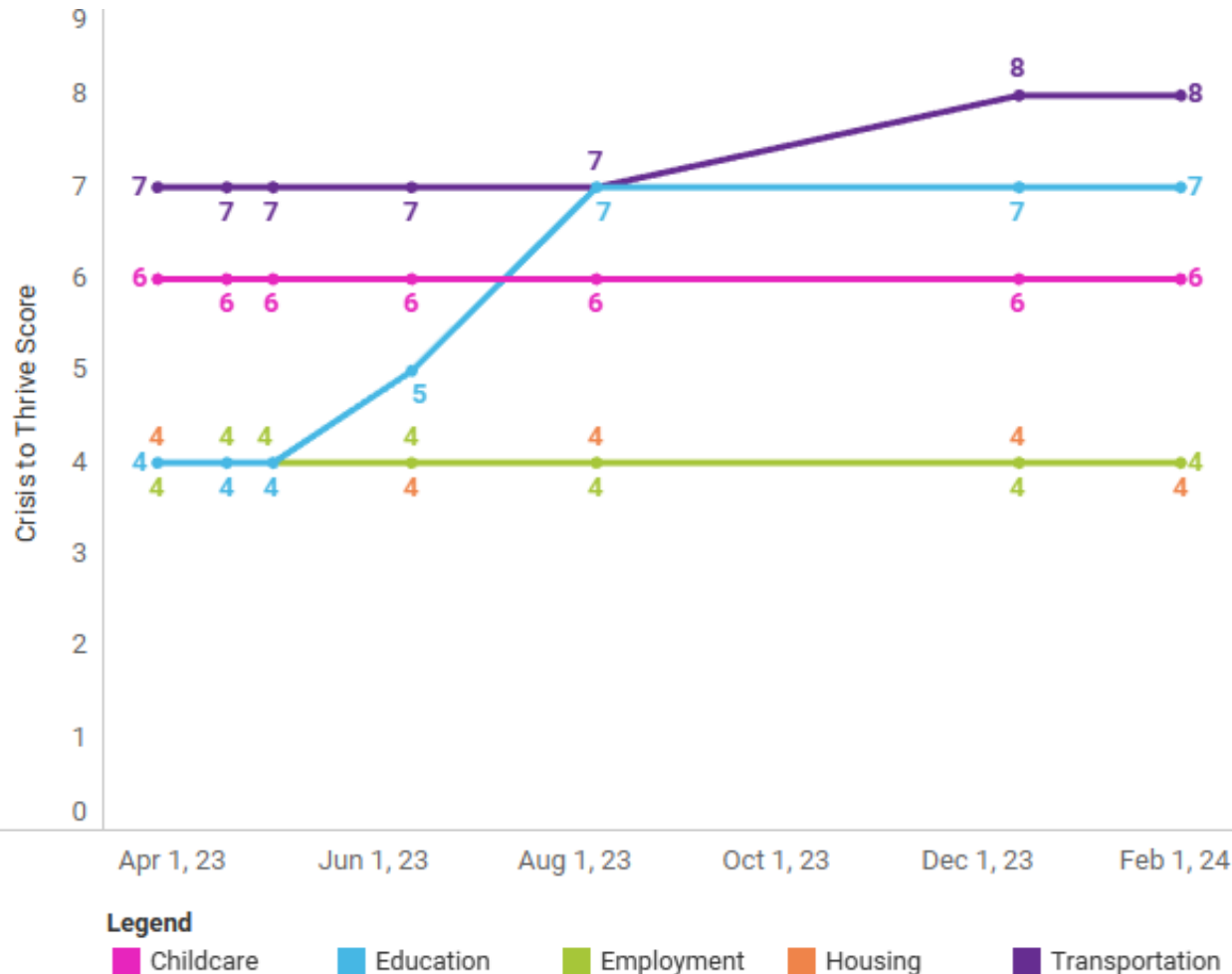
- Mid 20s with 2 children
- 10th grade education
- Lives at OneHeart where she has stable housing and child care.
- Works part time at a local restaurant

Jan's goals include:

- Obtain GED
- Find a career with stable income

Names have been changed to preserve anonymity

Jan's Journey



Jan met with her mentor 7 times over a 10 month period

She received \$1,638 in supportive funding, most of which was spent on educational fees and tests

Jan's Success



Education

Jan earned her GED in 3 months, enrolled in LPN program and received a Build Dakota Scholarship.

Transportation

Jan's car was serviced and made reliable

Housing

OneHeart continues to provide reliable, subsidized housing to Jan

Employment

Jan continues to work part time

Child Care

OneHeart continues to provide child care to Jan

Jan's Success

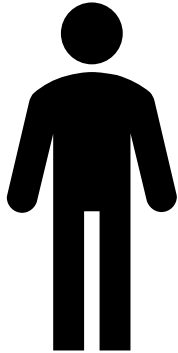


Jan was highly motivated

- Made great educational gains in short time period
- Has additional support from OneHeart
- Access to crisis funds

According to her mentor, Jan “finally sees the light at the end of the tunnel”

Client Challenges



Meet Wilson

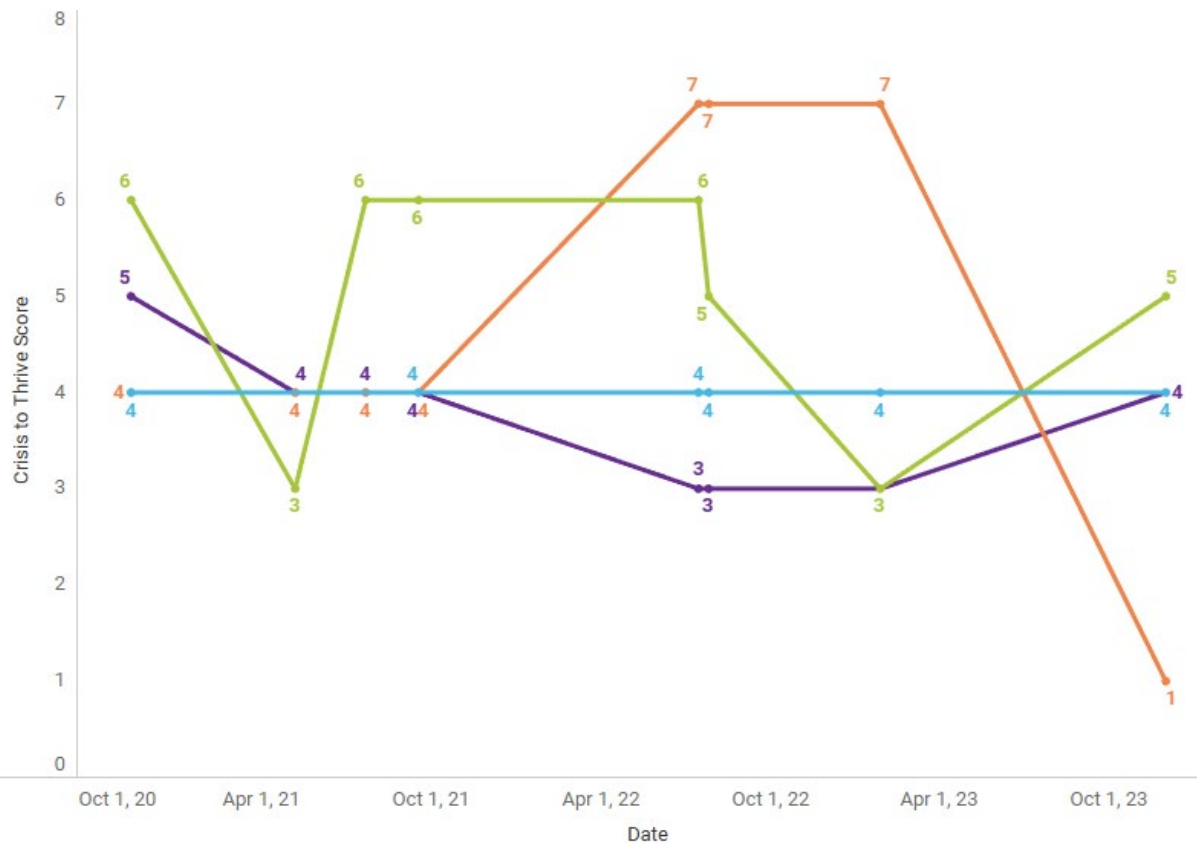
- Early 40s
- Did not graduate high school
- Relies on partner for housing
- Has children but does not have custody

Wilson's goals include:

- Obtain GED
- Explore educational opportunities

Names have been changed to preserve anonymity

Wilson's Journey



All \$1,085 in incentive funding helped meet Wilson's basic needs like food and gas.

Legend

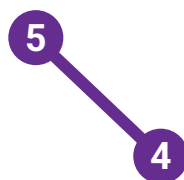
Childcare Education Employment Housing Transportation

Wilson's Challenges



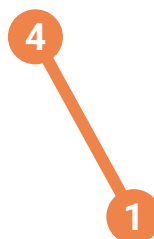
Education

In 3 years, Wilson has not completed his GED



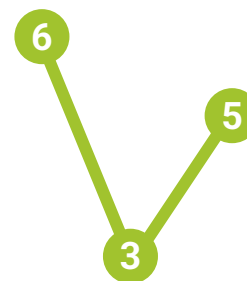
Transportation

Wilson no longer has access to his partner's car and now lives in a vehicle that needs work



Housing

Wilson has lived in a motel, with partner, and is now unhoused and living in his vehicle



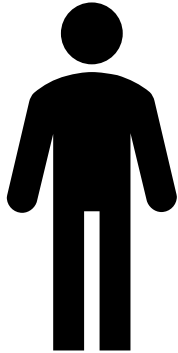
Employment

Wilson switched jobs 5 times in the past 3 years with periods of unemployment.

With unstable housing, it's hard to make gains anywhere else.

Wilson also suffered a mental health crisis after partner passed away.

Client Challenges

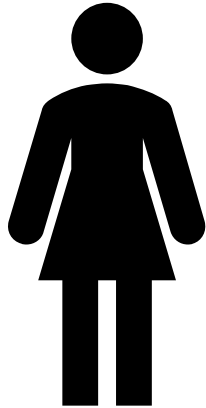


Wilson's path shows how the path from crisis to thriving is rarely linear.

Even with sustained mentorship and crisis funding, Wilson faces more barriers than when he started.

Wilson has not focused on GED while employment and housing fluctuate so frequently.

Client Success



Meet Cara

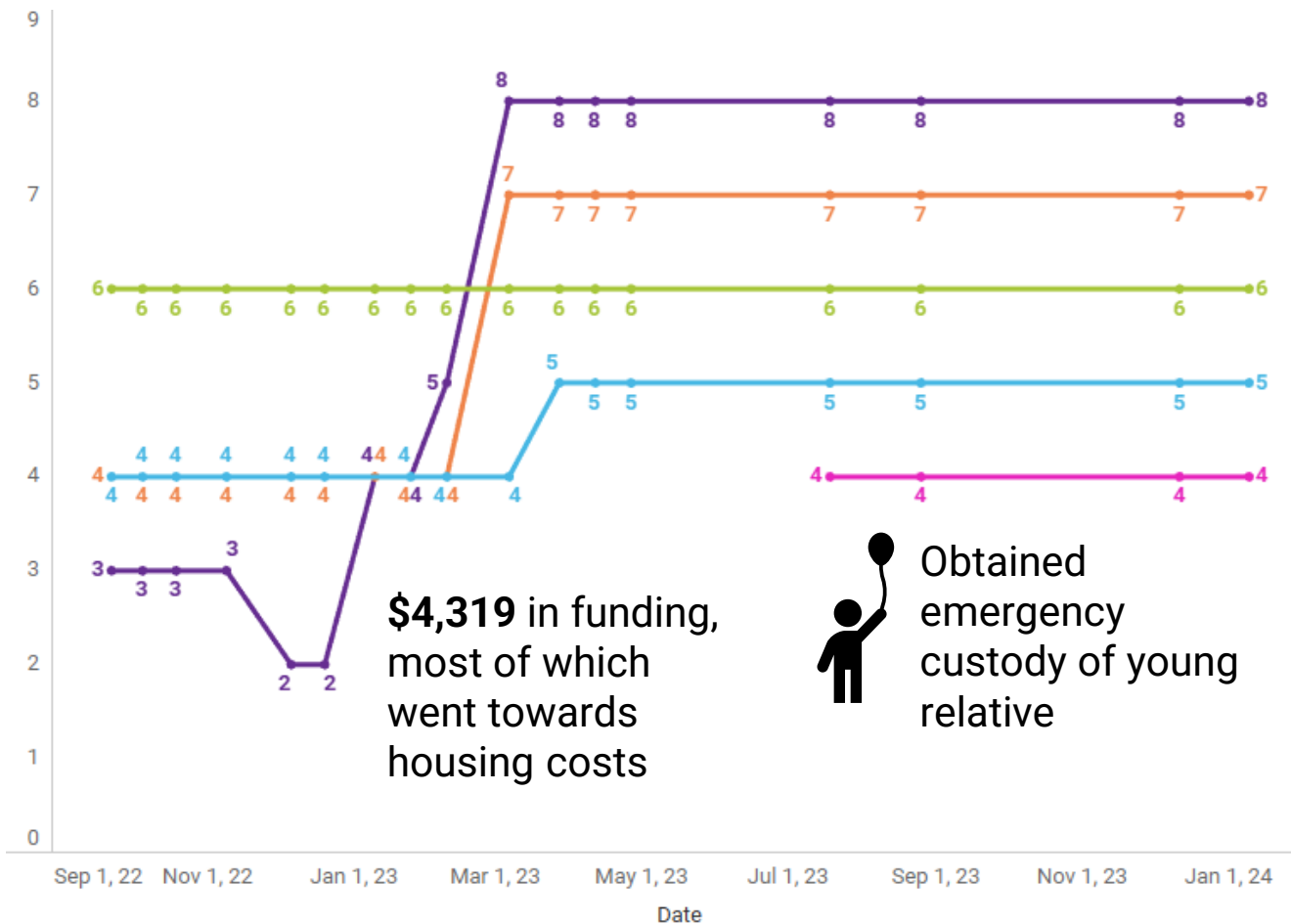
- Early 20s
- 8th grade education
- Lives at OneHeart
- Works full time at restaurant

Cara's goals include:

- Obtain GED
- Explore interest in college
- Save a deposit for an apartment

Names have been changed to preserve anonymity

Cara's Journey



\$4,319 in funding,
most of which
went towards
housing costs

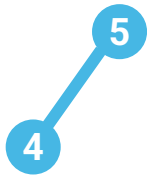


Obtained
emergency
custody of young
relative

Legend

- Childcare
- Education
- Employment
- Housing
- Transportation

Cara's Success



Education

Cara earned her GED in 9 months, delayed enrollment to take foster classes but starts Surgical Tech program in early 2024



Transportation

Cara obtained her drivers license and bought a car during her time in the program.



Housing

Cara started at OneHeart. She needed to obtain a market apartment to become a foster parent.



Employment

Cara maintained full time employment while obtaining her GED.



Child Care

Cara obtained custody of her relative 9 months into the program and is waiting for a Head Start spot to open up.

Cara's Success



Cara made gains in nearly every category while also obtaining custody of her relative

- Made educational gains in short period
- Had additional support from OneHeart
- Delayed enrollment in WDT to obtain foster care license.
- Access to crisis funds

Cara was highly motivated but also consistent in meeting with mentor. She built a great relationship with other Career Learning Center Staff for ongoing support after getting GED.

Final Thoughts

Workforce Connections is making a meaningful impact on clients seeking a job, skill, or education.

- Intensive mentorship and access to funding helps many clients obtain GEDs and work towards further educational goals.
- Qualitative data show that mentors have strong referral networks that benefit clients.
- Clients enrolled in other programs that met their needs like OneHeart, Jump Start, Head Start had more stability than those not enrolled.
- Mentors cannot address all barriers to stability for clients, especially persistent community challenges like lack of affordable housing, public transportation, child care or other family or friends for support.

Recommendations for the next 2 years include:

- Determine what counts as a program graduation or termination, especially as some clients obtain a GED and move on to pursue a four-year degree, which could mean 5-6 years of support for some.
- Establish client surveys or other ways to collect client voice.

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