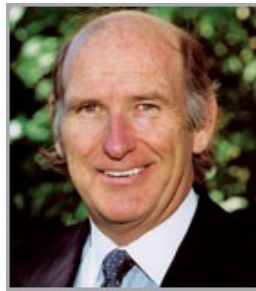


The Eckerd Family Foundation: Helping Foster Care Youth Succeed in School, Work, and Life

The [Eckerd Family Foundation \(EFF\)](#), based in Clearwater, Florida, is committed to promoting meaningful and lasting change to transform the lives of vulnerable youth and their families.

The Foundation is led by a Board of Directors comprised of family members of the founders, Jack and Ruth Eckerd. Because the Foundation intends to end its activities no later than May 1, 2014, they are very attentive to demonstrating that their work is making an impact, and focus on sustaining the work they've funded.



Joe Clark, Eckerd Family Foundation President

Before beginning active grantmaking in 1998, the Board determined what "vulnerable youth" meant to them and how they thought they would have the most impact. They decided to focus on three different groups of youth: those in the Juvenile Justice system; youth failing in school; and those aging out of the foster care system.

Most 18-year-olds coming from intact families can expect emotional and financial support for years to come, but once a foster child turns 18, the state is no longer legally obligated to provide any assistance. The Foundation was drawn to working with these youth, in part because they realized that they would be dealing with a manageable number of kids and because of the poor outcomes they face. Studies demonstrate that four years after leaving foster care only 46 percent of youth have graduated from high school, 42 percent have become parents themselves, 25 percent have been homeless, and fewer than 20 percent are self-supporting¹.

"We always try to identify what works to improve outcomes for kids," explains Jane Soltis, Vice President of Programs for the Eckerd Family Foundation. They connected with the [Youth](#)

[Transition Funders Group](#), a network of grantmakers whose mission is to help all youth make a successful transition to adulthood and it's [Foster Care Work Group](#). The work group, which Soltis co-chairs, developed a theory of change termed *Connected by 25* - that young people leaving the foster care system are economically self-sustaining by age 25.

The Foundation is testing *Connected by 25* in a demonstration project in Hillsborough County, Florida, in partnership with the [Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative](#) (JCYOI) and the Foster Care Work Group. The Eckerd Family Foundation has engaged a broad group of partners including child welfare leaders, community nonprofits, and youth themselves. "*Connected By 25* is not about doing the same-old things," explains, Joe Clark, President of the Foundation. "It is about listening to the kids in the system or who have recently left the system about how we can work differently to do better by them."

To put this belief into action, the Foundation asked foster youth what would help them achieve. Based on their response, they funded a dedicated school guidance counselor for all high school youth in foster care in Hillsborough County. Not only have hundreds of foster youth participated in educational planning with the guidance counselor, there has been an increase in the graduation rate, and the school system was influenced to continue to fund the position.

Another example of a strategy that works is supporting foster care youth to complete JCYOI's Financial Literacy Training and open an Opportunity Passport™ IDA, a matched savings account they can use for education, housing deposits and other assets.

"When we find an approach that works, we find it works in each of our three areas of interest," states Clark. "We also found that often, these groups of youth overlap, so successes in one area infiltrate another. Success breeds success!"

¹ Source: [Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative](#)

Visit the Eckerd Family Foundation online at www.eckerdfamilyfoundation.org.

Tips for Investing in Youth Development

We asked Joe Clark, President of the Eckerd Family Foundation, and Jane Soltis, Vice President of Programs, to share their advice for family foundations that are considering funding in the area of Youth Development. Here's what they said:

- Do your ground work to figure out what works to improve outcomes for kids. Find other communities or agencies that are doing it, and build on it or replicate it. Don't re-invent the wheel.
- Invest in programs that focus on [Positive Youth Development](#). It is demonstrated to make a difference for youth.
- Youth are part of the solution and not part of the problem. Involve them in improving the systems which serve them.
- Invest in advocacy – we've successfully changed Florida Statutes to expand program funding and Medicaid eligibility for youth who have aged out of foster care.
- Determine how to measure progress in a way that is easy to understand. Proof that strategies are working is powerful!
- Invest in leaders. Effective leaders have really made the difference in this work. You can have a great program, but if you don't have great leadership, it can go nowhere.
- Talk to funders who are working in the field; join the Youth Transition Funders Group.
- Develop relationships in order to build public-private partnerships – you can help public agencies figure out how to do things better for the children.

More Youth Development Resources

Connected By 25 - www.cby25.org

The Finance Project - www.financeproject.org

Florida's Children First - www.floridaschildrenfirst.org

Forum for Youth Investment - www.forumforyouthinvestment.org

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative - www.jimcaseyyouth.org

National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth - www.ncfy.com/yd

Youth Law Center - www.ylc.org

Youth Transition Funders Group - www.ytfg.org

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