



## **Phoenix Rising: How HOPE SF is Helping the City's Most Underserved Youth**

This report and the appendices summarize the accomplishments and lessons learned from the Phoenix Project two-year pilot.

Growing up in Sunnydale-Velasco, a community in the southeast corner of San Francisco, Robert sometimes felt alone. Located at the foot of San Francisco's McLaren Park, Sunnydale is the city's largest public housing site, home to 1,700 people. The barrack-like buildings were originally constructed in the 1940s as temporary housing for naval shipyard workers during wartime. Generations later, residents like Robert have lived there, cut off from San Francisco's prosperity.

Robert, 21, lost a cousin to gun violence and a close friend to incarceration. Two years ago he was introduced to the [Phoenix Project](#), which launched in 2017 to dramatically improve economic mobility for young people who experience barriers to opportunity. The unique model provides life coaching, behavioral health support, and holistic services, including educational support, job training and placement. Robert met a life coach named Philip Bounds. He shared with Bounds what life was like in Sunnydale.

"[Robert] felt a sense of uneasiness, like he didn't understand how people could walk around and look at the shootings and all the criminal activity as normal when he didn't," says Bounds. "He felt a certain way about it not being right, but he felt like the community accepted it."

Robert had graduated high school, but worried about finding a stable job. How would he support his two-year-old son? Like all participants in the Phoenix Project, "he came with some trauma," says Bounds.

Bounds helped Robert enroll in a job readiness program, which led to a construction job. But construction work is seasonal, and in April of this year, he was laid off. So Bounds connected him to a job training and placement program through the Phoenix Project.

In the midst of the job training program, Robert's father was diagnosed with stage four cancer. Robert kept attending the program, determined to finish it. He and his sister took turns taking their father to chemo treatments. This summer, he completed the program and got a provisional job cleaning street through the Department of Public Works. Faced with his father's mortality, he told Bounds recently that he feels overwhelmed. And just as he has been for the past two years, Bounds was once again ready to listen and to help.

## **The Struggle of Communities Disconnected from Resources**

The Phoenix Project is a collaborative of community organizations that provide life coaching and holistic services to young people ages 14 to 24, known as transitional age

youth. It's a pilot program of [HOPE SF](#), an ambitious cross-sector initiative to turn four distressed public housing sites into thriving communities. Over two decades, HOPE SF will transform 1,900 run-down homes into more than 5,300 units of housing at all levels of affordability, starting with San Francisco's most vulnerable families. Mindful of historical trauma inflicted by city government when it revitalized neighborhoods in the past and pushed out communities of color in the process, HOPE SF is determined to rebuild these developments without displacement.

HOPE SF is not just about replacing dilapidated housing with shiny new buildings, though. It's the signature anti-poverty initiative of the City and County of San Francisco, and its vision includes expanding access to opportunity for the longtime residents in these developments.

The current reality for a young person who lives in one of the four HOPE SF sites — Sunnydale, Alice Griffith, Potrero Terrace and Annex, and Hunters View — is bleak. More than half of the students who live in these sites are chronically absent from school. Of the approximately 850 transitional age youth, 66 percent have no earnings and aren't on track to graduate or even enrolled in school.

While programs exist to help connect people to jobs, very few of them reach these youth. Of the \$90 million that the City spends annually on workforce services, only three percent<sup>1</sup> reaches public housing residents.

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“The challenges are intergenerational. A lot of the families have been there for a long time,” says Maurice Moret, executive director of the Phoenix Project. “There are substance abuse issues to institutionalized racism to violence. The challenge is that we're in a very unstable area. The areas are disconnected and still segregated from resources.”

When HOPE SF looked at ways to improve the economic mobility of these youth, it realized that existing programs that served them weren't doing enough. Workforce training programs tended to be brief in duration, running anywhere from a few weeks to a year at most — too short to mitigate a lifetime of systemic exclusion from resources and generational poverty. They also didn't incorporate enough wraparound services. If

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<sup>1</sup> Amount is from FY 2014-15 and includes workforce programming across multiple city agencies.

youth needed other services or case management, they'd have to seek them out at other organizations — and that was a disincentive for them to complete the programs. HOPE SF realized that if it was truly going to make a difference in the lives of these youth, it needed to try something different.

### **“It Takes a Village” — A New Collaborative Model**

In 2014, Ellie Rossiter, HOPE SF's initiative officer and partnership director, flew to Boston to visit programs introduced to her by the Annie E. Casey Foundation: EMPATH and Roca. These two exceptional programs help young mothers, formerly incarcerated young people, and others onto a path of self-sufficiency, away from violence and out of poverty. Rossiter toured the programs and attended trainings. She was impressed by what she learned.

EMPATH used a framework called the “Bridge to Self Sufficiency” which focused on five key areas of clients' lives: health, family life, career, finances, and education. The framework had come out of studies on the effects of trauma and poverty on people's brains. Both programs were outcomes driven and collected substantial data to measure progress. Another thing that particularly struck Rossiter was the idea of “relentless outreach,” a term coined by Roca. No one was ever kicked out of Roca's programs, no matter how little success they seemed to be having.

“People naturally have reasons, or are drawn into things, where they drop off. But that doesn't mean that they want to leave the program,” says Rossiter, explaining the perspective of the program staff. “It means that in this moment, they're having a setback. And so, the idea of relentless outreach is that they're always a part of your program, and that it is really up to you to make sure that you're not losing touch with that client.”

Inspired by both programs, HOPE SF issued a request for proposals (RFP) in 2016, looking to build a similar program in San Francisco for transitional age youth living in HOPE SF sites. A service model like this didn't exist in San Francisco yet. The RFP requirements stipulated that the proposals should be trauma-informed, include wraparound services, and individualized to each participant. It should be long-term, engaging participants in a relentless outreach model for five to seven years. Like all of HOPE SF's programs, it would be data-driven to track progress and make course corrections. And as HOPE SF knew that no one single organization offered the level of comprehensive support a program like this one needed, the proposal must involve collaboration.

Hunters Point Family — collaborating with seven community organizations that had long worked in the targeted neighborhoods — won the RFP for its proposal, called the Phoenix Project. The partner organizations are:

- 1. *Young Community Developers (YCD)***
- 2. *100% College Prep Institute***
- 3. *3rd Street Youth Center & Clinic***
- 4. *Bayview Hunters Point Foundation***
- 5. *Samoan Community Development Center***
- 6. *Five Keys Charter School***
- 7. *TURF***

With seed funding, Hunters Point Family hired Maurice Moret as the Phoenix Project's executive director. Moret is a native of the Bayview Hunters Point area. He has a master's in education and 18 years' experience in youth development and case management for Black children living in low-income housing communities heavily affected by violence.

HOPE SF brought EMPATH out to San Francisco to lead trainings for Moret and the leadership of the partner organizations on their model, which they called "mobility mentoring." While the collaborative found EMPATH's "Bridge to Self Sufficiency" framework helpful, they also didn't want to replicate the Boston-based program's model so closely. "The Bay Area has a different kind of flavor," says Moret. "How they did it in Boston, and the kind of staff they were using — that model wouldn't work in these areas."

Instead, the collaborative worked with Dr. Theopia Jackson, the director of Saybrook University's Department of Humanistic & Clinical Psychology. Dr. Jackson had developed a framework known as BPSS, which stands for Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual, that resonated with the collaborative.

"BPSS is a youth-driven model," says Saidah Leatutufu, the director of economic advancement for HOPE SF in the Mayor's Office. "The youth are able to assess what they value and what they believe. That will lead them to their own success as opposed to a traditional case manager who says, 'This is what you need to do to achieve your goal.'"

But perhaps what drives the program the most, Moret says, is its emphasis on relationship building and outreach by people who have deep roots in the neighborhoods. "The strength of the Phoenix Project is that it's partnering with

community-based organizations. Its strength is that it brings in the wisdom and expertise of the neighborhood.”

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The collaborative format allows these organizations to work together in a different way, says Leatutufu. “They’re no longer working in silos. They come together to use their collective expertise.” Leatutufu describes the Phoenix Project as an “underpinning” that makes it easier for youth to connect with an existing ecosystem of services. “Without the Phoenix Project, the young person would fall through the cracks. With the Phoenix Project, they would be held as they navigate that services ecosystem.”

The community organizations in the Phoenix Project collaborative are called Village Partners, a reference to the African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Village Partners have expertise in college preparation, high school diploma and GED attainment, employment services and training, physical, mental and behavioral health services, and violence prevention.

And each HOPE SF site is like a different village, Moret explains.

“Every village has its own language, has its own customs, has its own leader. Meaning that we don’t go in there telling them, ‘This is what you need.’ That’d be coming in from the outside. We’re really coming in listening, letting them tell us what they need. And then using Phoenix as a way to help them get there.”

### **Individualized Support from Trusted Adults**

When Robert graduated from the five-week job readiness program, his sick father couldn’t be there. Philip Bounds stepped in for his dad by driving him to the ceremony and cheering him on.

Bounds is one of the Phoenix Project’s three life coaches. Every youth who enters the Phoenix Project gets connected with a coach and creates an Individual Mobility Roadmap — a tool that helps the young person visualize goals and understand the steps needed to achieve them. While adults can make suggestions, youth set their own goals and milestones.

“So if it’s somebody between 14 and 17, primarily we’re going to be dealing with education, helping to guide them through the school system, through high school and

the challenges that they face,” says Moret. If the youth is 18 and over, primarily the support is with employment, as it is in Robert’s case.

The young person also completes a baseline assessment in five areas: workforce, education, health, peace promotion, and wealth. The assessment reveals how the young person views themselves and helps the coach understand how much trauma they’ve faced and how much resilience — meaning support — they have. The youth are categorized into three tiers — the more trauma and the lower the resiliency, the higher the tier, and the more support services required.

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Building trust is key. “We’re intentionally trying to learn what they’re going through, which takes time, which takes trust,” says Moret. Because of trauma, “people have their guard up because they’ve been in positions where they’ve felt like there’s nobody to trust.”

If a youth needs therapy, or substance abuse counseling, or a GED, the coach acts as an expeditor across services, referring them to the appropriate Village Partner. More than two-thirds of Phoenix youth engage with Village Partners towards achieving their defined goals.

The Phoenix Project also employs five Youth Development Advocates, residents of HOPE SF sites that are closer in age to the youth or “near peer.” They’re “someone closer in age that can identify with their struggle,” says Moret. “They can speak more in the language that you speak.”

The Youth Development Advocates embody the relentless outreach aspect of the program, staying in frequent contact with the youth, asking them about their class schedule or job interviews, nudging them to meet with their coach, and generally just checking in regularly.

Together, the Youth Development Advocates, Village Partners, and coaches create a strong support network for the youth.

“We coach. But sometimes I’m just the sounding board,” says Bounds. “They want to bounce ideas off me just to hear how they feel about something they came up with. Sometimes they just want to come and feed off my energy. I’ve noticed that they do

want to be around something positive. They do want to be involved in something positive.”

## **Just Getting Started**

Since the Phoenix Project launched as a pilot at two sites in July 2017, it has expanded to all four HOPE SF sites and enrolled 100 youth. Of those, 70 are engaged in Village Partner services. So far, six youth are gainfully employed, one has graduated from community college, and two went from facing homelessness to living in stable housing.

HOPE SF also created a customized client data management system using the Salesforce platform for the Phoenix Project to collect, aggregate, and use data to measure participants' level of trauma upon entry into the program and to track their progress over the course of their participation. Village Partners use the system as a dashboard to see an overall snapshot of what's going on with a youth. Coaches use the system in detail for assessments and case management.

At an aggregate level, the data can tell a story, or confirm what Phoenix staff knows anecdotally. For example, the data revealed something interesting about employment efforts.

“What we learned through our data is that when we did get folks jobs, that very quickly, they lost them,” says Moret. “So we realized that there was something deeper than just getting a job.”

So the coaches dug deeper. In the context of the BPSS framework, what was leading to youth not keeping their jobs?

“I feel some of their trauma is holding them back from keeping a job,” says Bounds. “They're internalizing every criticism. You know, at a job you're going to make a mistake. When they're told that they've made a mistake, their trauma makes them feel like they've F-ed up so bad that either they're going to defend themselves and not hear that they made a mistake, they're going to defend themselves and get themselves fired, or they're going to leave and not come back.”

Bounds believes deeply in the power of therapy to help young people in these communities. That's why he decided to join the Phoenix Project as a coach. “I'm just trying to guide them, like I'm always telling them to put tools in their toolbox to use in certain times, in certain situations to where they don't blow off, to where they don't get



themselves fired, to where they don't get into a fight, to where they don't harm themselves or harm someone else.”

Because of its innovative model and successful outcomes, the Phoenix Project was recently awarded two years of funding from the mayor’s office, which allows it to expand to two additional non-HOPE SF public housing sites (Oakdale and Westbrook) to serve a total of six sites. The project is also in talks with several City departments to hopefully secure funding for five years.

The funding comes at a key time as the Phoenix Project continues to make inroads into areas of great need. While they’ve done a lot in two years, it’s also a short amount of time, Moret notes. They’re just getting started.

“We’re operating on a skeleton,” says Moret, noting that they need more staff, more support for them, and private offices at each site. There is currently no dedicated meeting space at the Potrero site, for example. Often times they have to meet youth in a recreation center, where it’s hard to have deep, private conversations with the distracting sounds of other kids running around playing basketball.

Bounds would like to see the youth get connected into services more quickly. Sometimes it takes a week to get a youth into a treatment program, and a week is too long.

“I’ve seen it over and over,” he says. “With a young man we had before, he had to wait a week for response. And he needed money, I guess. He broke into a car and got caught. So we’re trying to figure out a way to get a better turnaround.”

And while the desired coach-to-youth ratio is one to eight to accommodate the intense level of engagement, the reality is different. Bounds says that he’s currently coaching 12 youth. “Once you help someone, they know someone else that needs help. And I have a hard time saying, ‘No, I can’t help’ because the manual says you’re only supposed to help eight.”

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Planting the seeds of something life-changing and community-changing takes time and individual attention.

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## APPENDIX A: The BPSS Framework

### Shifting the Paradigm

### BIO PSYCHO SOCIAL SPIRITUAL



The true innovation of the Phoenix Project lies in its use of the bio psycho social model to target all aspects of a young person's life to build their resiliency. The model calls for youth to identify their assets and the skills and abilities that make them resilient as they come to understand how trauma impacts their lives. It considers physical and mental health, social engagement and relationship building, and spiritual connections.

All Phoenix Youth team with Life Coaches and Youth Development Advocates who guide them in assessing their resiliency and exposure to adverse experiences, goal setting and attainment, as well as navigating racist systems that do not typically value them or their communities.

## APPENDIX B: Findings & Recommendations

The Phoenix Project was launched as a pilot to address the gaps in San Francisco's services system. After two years of implementation, we have identified the following findings, which we recommend to our public and private colleagues. These recommendations have systemic implications and should be seen as critical to successfully serving transitional age youth.

### Staffing

- Increase staffing of coaches – While the ideal ratio of coach to youth is 1:8, this is not currently realistic with the number of youths enrolled. Explore setting the ratio according to tiers (a lower ratio for higher need youth). Increase the number of coaches to at least two per site.
- Hire clinical staff – Staff with clinical and social work backgrounds are needed to manage serious trauma and mental health needs, and to create a culture of healing for both youth and staff.
- Support for staff – Staff need competitive wages and support for vicarious trauma. This will help retain staff.

### Programming

- Peer-to-peer programming – Implement a youth peer-to-peer component to promote leadership and mentorship. This will create a sense of community among the youth.

- Youth decision-making – Explore ways for building infrastructure so that youth can be at the table to inform decision-making.
- Healing from trauma – Provide a variety of services such as mental health, therapy, coping skills and more to help youth address trauma that they have experienced. This supports them in healing and prepares them to receive the benefits of coaching.
- Make it easier for youth to view their own progress – Implement ways for youth to directly engage, monitor, and celebrate their progress towards their goals through tools that feel relevant to them. This could possibly include a digital app, similar to health and fitness apps.
- Incentives – Evidence shows that incentives are necessary to support, celebrate, and promote goal achievement. Create a stipend program, up to \$1,000 per youth, and determine over what period of time it would be distributed and for what milestones.

### **Collaborative Structure**

- Programmatic support – Implement regular, ongoing programmatic support and training for Phoenix Project staff and Village Partner staff to ensure a shared understanding of program approach and desired goals. In particular: adopt organizational practices that value and support personal healing from trauma. When all organizations frame their institutional practices through a healing lens, they contribute to transforming the entire services system so that they can successfully carry out trauma-informed practices in their programming.
- Support for the Collaborative – The organizations in the Phoenix Project have previously been serving the same population, but in siloes. It's imperative that the Phoenix Project be structured and supported financially to create alignment and integration across the organizations, as well as with City agencies. There needs to be support for collaboration, not just direct programming.

### **Data**

- Determine data collection as related to program outcome and goals – The bulk of data collected has been around the program's trauma-informed focus. What additional data needs to be collected to track economic or wellness outcomes?
- Data standardization – Continue to refine data collection processes to focus on the most powerful indicators. Provide ongoing training and technical support to staff and Village Partners. Create permanent staff positions for data analysis, culture of learning, and continuous improvement.

## **APPENDIX C: The Partnership for HOPE SF**

The Partnership for HOPE SF provided seed funding for the Phoenix Project and continues to build capacity among the organizations in the collaborative. The Partnership for HOPE SF was established in 2011 by civic and philanthropic leaders who came together to support the City of San Francisco in creating new practices to achieve the ambitious vision of racially and economically inclusive communities.

The Partnership plays a critical role in convening key partners and experts, providing technical assistance and capacity building, overseeing research and evaluation, and advocating for the long-term sustainability of the initiative. It also raises funds to seed innovative programs in education, health care, resident leadership, and economic advancement.

Leading The Partnership are three organizations: The Office of the Mayor at the City and County of San Francisco, the San Francisco Foundation, and Enterprise Community Partners. In addition, many organizations and individuals — including foundations, business leaders, housing experts, and residents — support the partnership with expertise and funding.

The Office of the Mayor is responsible for the overall design and implementation of HOPE SF. The San Francisco Foundation oversees civic engagement, fundraising, and knowledge sharing. Enterprise Community Partners brings national best practices on housing affordability, economic equity, and mixed-income inclusion.

Together, The Partnership for HOPE SF works towards a vision of resident-driven change to transform distressed public housing sites into healthy, thriving neighborhoods.

## **APPENDIX D: Funders**

### **Funders for The Partnership for HOPE SF**

50 Fund (Super Bowl 50)

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

AT&T

Bank of America

Chan Zuckerberg Initiative

SH Cowell Foundation

The California Healthcare Foundation

Enterprise Community Partners

David A. Friedman & Paulette J. Meyer

The Friedman Family Foundation

Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund

Walter and Elise Haas Fund

Hellman Foundation

Genentech

John and Marcia Goldman

JP Morgan Chase

Kaiser Permanente

Living Cities

Metta Fund

Salesforce.com Foundation

The San Francisco Foundation

The Stupski Foundation

Wells Fargo Foundation

The City and County of San Francisco

### **Funders for The Phoenix Project**

Annie E. Casey Foundation

JP Morgan Chase

Friedman Family Foundation

Hellman Foundation

Stupski Foundation

Wells Fargo Foundation

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