Belmont Innovation Labs



From Insight to Action

What Tennessee Is Learning from Its Investment in Youth Transitioning from Foster Care


Creative Arts

CONTENTS

In This Report

SECTION		PAGE
	Executive Summary	04
01	Why This Matters	08
02	Systems Change Requires Ecosystem Innovation	10
03	The Power of Partnership	14
04	Six Investments in Tennessee's Young People	18
	Connect Our Kids	20
	Elmington Elevates	22
	Forward Steps	24
	Jonathan's Path	26
	TN Voices	28
	New Culture	30
05	Catalytic Capital Fuels Social Innovation	34
06	Honest Learnings	36
07	The Risks We're Taking	40
08	What Comes Next	42





We believe lasting change happens at the speed of trusting relationship. It requires collaborators that represent the ecosystem to work together for solutions. Our key partners have each played vital roles in making this work possible.

POWERED BY PARTNERSHIP

Lasting change happens at the speed of trusting relationship.

Every Child TN

Tennessee Governor's Faith-Based and Community Initiative

Belmont Innovation Labs

Belmont University

R Relativ

TN Department of Children's Services

Essential Innovations

AccessVentures

A LETTER FROM LANCE VILLIO

Better really is possible

The Governor's Faith-Based and Community Initiative is committed to better outcomes for the most vulnerable children in our state. Through Every Child Tennessee (ECTN), our statewide initiative in partnership with the Department of Children's Services, we work across four pillars: family preservation, foster family recruitment, foster family retention and youth aging out of the system. This report belongs to that fourth pillar, the transition into adulthood.

Our team's role has been to convene. We brought the Transition Youth Executive Council together and have worked to be allies at every turn, building a public-private partnership broad enough to invite real capital to the table so that a vision could become reality.

Belmont University has been vital to that work through the Belmont Innovation Labs' innovation design: understanding the root causes behind such bleak outcomes for young people leaving care, then designing solutions against those causes rather than around them. This is the moment we find out what those designs can do in practice.

Depth of collaboration like this is rare. Enduring commitment to one problem, held over years, is rarer still. The people at this table are bold: visionary leaders and committed frontline workers, doggedly determined to produce better outcomes for young people.

It is the result of more than two years of dedication from collaborators and advisors across Tennessee who wanted to think differently about how we reimagine, rewire and reconnect this state for its most vulnerable young people.

A particular thanks belongs to our capital partners, who have courageously committed substantial funding. This philanthropic capital is de-risking the follow-on capital that comes next. It gives high-potential ventures the chance to build an evidentiary base in the Tennessee market, proof that no one would have funded on a promise alone.

None of this depends on every single pilot succeeding. It depends on true innovation, honest adaptation and clear-eyed learning. Ultimately this is about thriving futures for our young people, next-generation leaders who deserve brighter, bolder, more beautiful futures. Enabling that is what this work is for.



"The Reconstruct Challenge: Thriving Youth shows what's possible when evidence and compassion meet. Tennessee is proving that innovation and community can work hand in hand to rewrite the story for youth leaving foster care."

Lance Villio

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GOVERNOR'S FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At a Glance

Tennessee is testing a different way to change outcomes for young people leaving foster care: bring new capital and new solutions into the state, test them fast, learn honestly and decide with evidence. That moment rests on 18 months of research and cross-sector collaboration, directed and evaluated by ecosystem players themselves. This mid-term review evaluates the work at three levels: the ecosystem innovation journey, the Reconstruct challenge and the venture pilots.

THE PROBLEM

~850

young people age out of Tennessee foster care each year[1]

$150M

in lifetime costs could be avoided if Tennessee's ~850 young people leaving care each year fared as well as their peers (education, early parenthood, incarceration and homelessness)[2]

3

leverage points identified through our research: supportive adult relationships, stable housing, mental health care

OUR RESPONSE

~$1.5M

Reconstruct fund, built by 16 funders

58

applications from 11 states

6

ventures funded at $100,000 for 12-month pilots

THE RETURN SO FAR: MARCH-JULY 2026

39/100+

young people served in the first five months, out of 100+ the pilots aim to serve by March 2027[3]

3

leverage points, each now being delivered, with early signals:[4]

7.5 relationship connections per young person mapped

19 young people newly housed across 2 pilots (target: 38)

5 residents opted in to ongoing therapy after the first group session

20 yrs

of federal rental assistance for young people at Lumen Flats secured through a new HUD voucher partnership.

15

new referral partners, connecting youth to support (target: 6)

WHAT COMES NEXT?

$300K+ in a limited follow-on capital pool through the Reconstruct fund, to scale what proves out in Tennessee.

Venture Pilot Portfolio

Reporting period: March 1 to July 31, 2026

LEVERAGE POINTS

Primary · Secondary

Relationships · Housing · Mental Health

Connect Our Kids

Kinship mapping platform and family-search training

- Relationships

Proven nationally, new to Tennessee

DELIVERING

Elmington Elevates

Purpose-built studio housing (Lumen Flats) with a living stipend and voluntary programming

- Housing
- Relationships · Mental Health

New model, first site

DELIVERING

Forward Steps

Post-secondary financial support, 1:1 mentoring and navigation

- Relationships
- Mental Health

Proven in Colorado, new to Tennessee

FIRST COHORT - SEPTEMBER 2026

Jonathan's Path

Readiness-based housing continuum with a 24/7 support line

- Housing
- Relationships

Tennessee-founded, scaling

DELIVERING

TN Voices

Clinical care, peer support and digital wellness inside a housing site

- Mental Health
- Relationships

New model, first site

DELIVERING

New Culture

Youth Navigator support for Child and Family Team Meetings

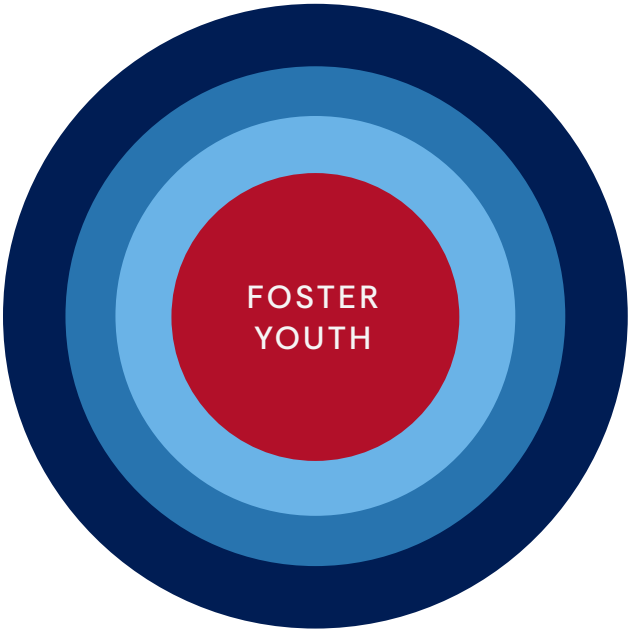
- Relationships
- Mental Health

Concluded through a responsible exit, August 2026

RESPONSIBLE EXIT

Ecosystem Innovation in View

Systems change requires ecosystem innovation. This work is happening in and across multiple layers and seeks to address the critical gaps preventing better outcomes. This mid-term report on the Reconstruct Challenge: Thriving Youth shares progress, evaluation, insights and actions. Every layer is ultimately directed at one primary aim: thriving futures for foster youth in the state of Tennessee.



The Ecosystem Innovation Journey

The structured innovation facilitation experience: discover, design, deploy. It engages ecosystem players and centers lived experience of youth from early research through funded pilots.

The Reconstruct Challenge

The funding and enabling mechanism at the Deploy stage: $1.5M invested in six pilots in TN against the leverage points the research identified.

The Venture Pilots

Six live pilots across supportive relationships, housing and mental health care, each designed to test and scale new models for better outcomes for youth.

Foster Youth

Youth at the center. Around 850 age out of Tennessee's foster care system each year. Every layer of the system exists to enable thriving futures for our most vulnerable youth.



Summary of the Mid-term Review Findings

This report draws on Relativ Impact's mid-term review of the first five months of the pilots (March 1 to July 31, 2026). The analysis is built on 11 semi-structured interviews (July 23 to August 13, 2026) across five stakeholder groups, KPI data assessment and venture material review. Relativ Impact served as a partner in Discover and Design phases of work, shaping and evaluating work along the way.

Established

Shared problem definition and leverage points

Cross-sector relationships and shared ownership

Greater visibility and legitimacy for the issue

Capital mobilized and deployed

A live pilot portfolio

Additional referral and delivery capacity

Emerging

Venture implementation traction

Youth engagement

Operational collaboration

Delivery of each venture's intended approach

Potential payer pathways

Capital unlocked for young people

Not yet known

Outcomes attributable to the pilots

Comparative effectiveness

Stable cost per outcome

Rural replicability

Long-term sustainability

Which components drive outcomes in bundled models

WHAT WE'RE LEARNING, LAYER BY LAYER

The Ecosystem

Tennessee has created the conditions for ecosystem change: a shared definition of the problem, cross-sector legitimacy and three agreed leverage points. Complementary partnerships made this possible. The public sector provided the mandate, a university the institutional home, facilitators the structure and DCS the operational reality. The Transition Youth Executive Council may prove the most enduring asset of all – the ecosystem shaping the work from day one.

The Reconstruct Challenge

Risk-tolerant capital can bring untested ideas into a public system responsibly, and a portfolio learns faster than any single grant. The Reconstruct Challenge turned design into funded pilots. Its next test is discipline: evidence that keeps pace with delivery, shared visibility for every partner, explicit decision standards and a clear shared operating model.

The Pilots

Early signals are positive: new referral routes, housing and service pathways, stronger local partnerships and resources unlocked for young people. Context fit, institutional access and trusted relationships proved central to feasibility, and maturity varies widely across the portfolio. One pilot concluded early, at low cost and with its lessons captured.

Why This Matters

Every year, about 850 young people reach adulthood in Tennessee's foster care system without being reunified with family or adopted.

By age 21, young people who aged out of foster care face steep odds:

37%
do not have stable housing

54%
have been incarcerated

45%
are unemployed

11%
are enrolled in college or vocational training[5]



A shortage of options, not of intent.

These outcomes reflect the complexity of challenges facing young people transitioning from foster care. Better outcomes require a broader community of partners and resources supporting young people as they transition to adulthood.

A care timeframe that is getting wider.

In July 2025, Tennessee extended its voluntary Extension of Foster Care Services to age 23.[6] It also creates a longer window of opportunity: more time to build trusted relationships, stabilize housing, and encourage young people to use support and services they may have declined, or not felt ready for, at 18.

Why community capacity is critical.

Community organizations, landlords, employers, congregations and local providers can offer much of what a young person needs after leaving care. They can also keep showing up after formal services or state responsibility end. The central question for this work was how to mobilize and coordinate that community capacity at scale, in partnership with the state.



IN THEIR WORDS

"Often times systems are just to check a box. Housing – check. Job – check. We miss the consistency that young people need. Providing them with that support can be a determining factor in how they're able to respond as adults."

ERIC DAVIS
Executive Director, I am Next • Transition Youth Executive Council Member • Former Foster Youth

WHY THIS MATTERS

Meet, Heaven.

Heaven entered foster care at age 14. Between ages 14 and 18 she experienced frequent changes in where she lived. Today, she lives at Lumen Flats in Knoxville.



IN FOSTER CARE

"When I was in the system, your brain gets stuck in survival mode. It's 'Where am I going to sleep tomorrow?' 'Am I going to get food tomorrow?' It's not 'What am I going to do in the future?' And 'Who could I be in the future?' You're stuck thinking about your day to day, because you want to survive each day."

THE TRANSITION

"A lot of people don't understand that you can't expect someone who just turns 18 out of the foster care system to be able to take care of themselves or even be stable. And people often are like, oh, well, you're out of the system, so it's over now. It's not over, for sure. People don't understand that. You carry that with you forever."

AT LUMEN FLATS

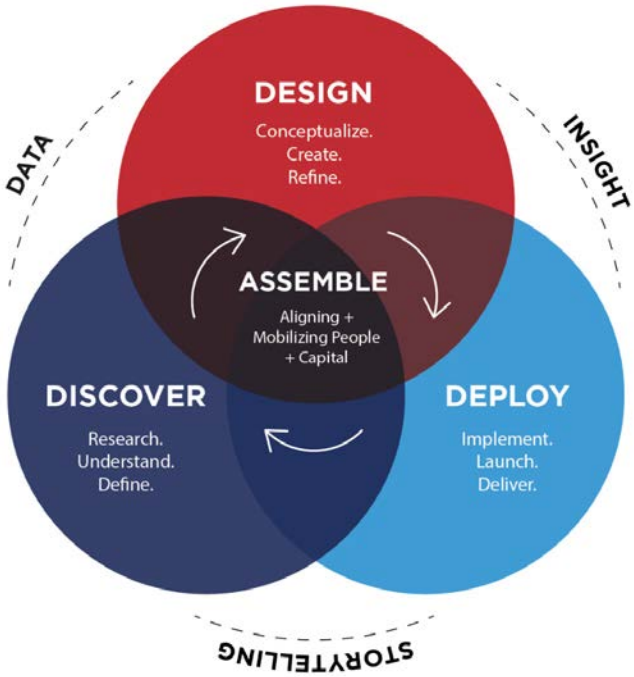
"I would say there are absolutely no negatives to Lumen Flats. It's literally a paradise for anybody who's ever been through hardship and anyone who's ever been in the system or struggled in the past in general. It's just a place where you can foster growth, but you can also heal from the past."

HEAVEN, 20

Resident, Lumen Flats

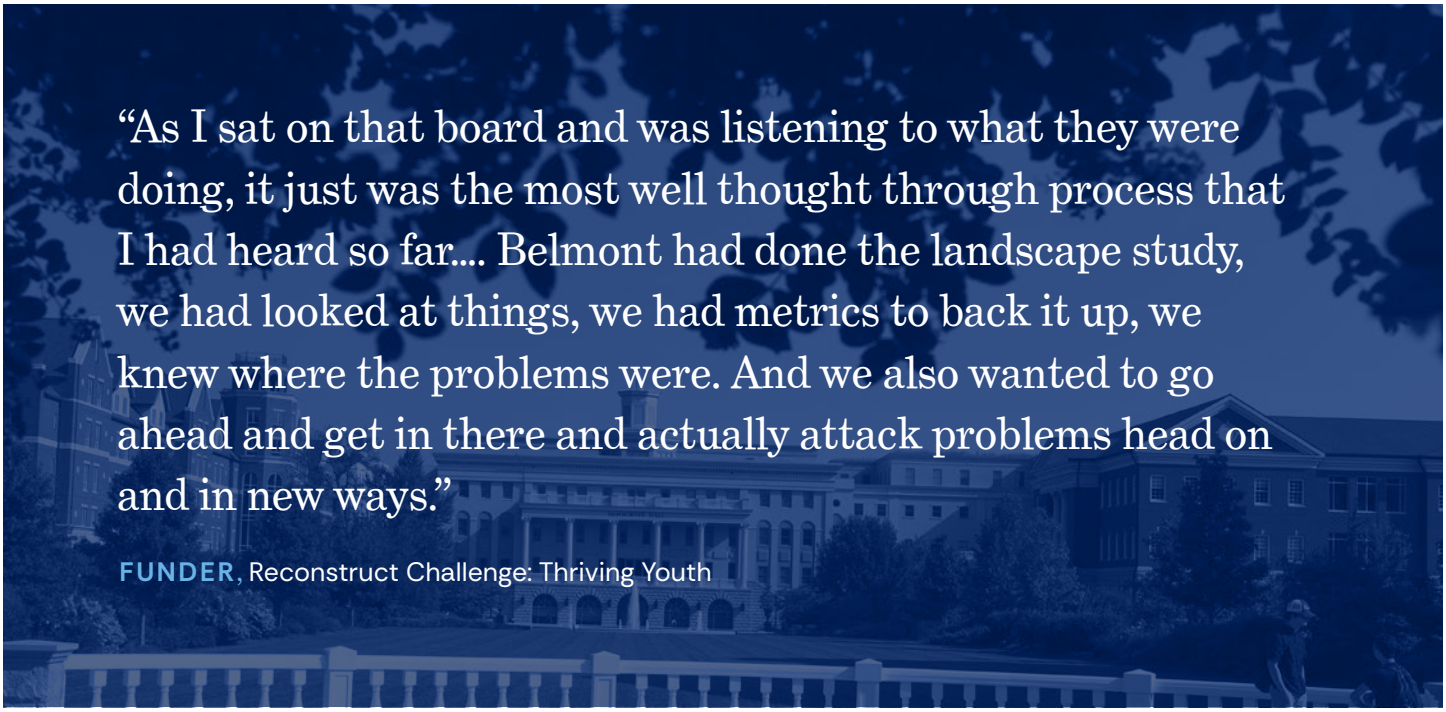
Systems Change Requires Ecosystem Innovation

The foster care system intended to serve young people is complex and dynamic. Understanding its challenges requires deep analysis of its various components and identifying multiple, strategic places for innovations that enable meaningful improvement. The challenges facing young people leaving care are rooted in how the system is structured, not in any single cause. That is why siloed effort, one-off fixes and duplicated investment tend to fall short. Changing a system takes cross-sector collaboration, an entrepreneurial mindset and a willingness to test what has not been tried. It also means seeing the system for what it is: an ecosystem of interdependent people, institutions and relationships, where lasting change depends as much on the human connections that hold it together as on its technical infrastructure.



Innovation design at work: SOLVE 3D

Belmont Innovation Labs' framework moves systemic challenges from research to funded, real-world solutions in three phases. The fulcrum of the model is the group of cross-sector partners assembled around the table for the work. The following page shows the model in practice for foster care.



"As I sat on that board and was listening to what they were doing, it just was the most well thought through process that I had heard so far.... Belmont had done the landscape study, we had looked at things, we had metrics to back it up, we knew where the problems were. And we also wanted to go ahead and get in there and actually attack problems head on and in new ways."

FUNDER, Reconstruct Challenge: Thriving Youth

Innovation Design Journey

0. Assemble

Ongoing from 2024

OVERVIEW

Establishes the cross-sector coalition, governance and trust a project needs before any solution work begins, and continues throughout.

DELIVERABLE

Transition Youth Executive Council; formal partnership with TN DCS.

KEY FINDINGS & ASSETS

Council seats include government, philanthropy, business, faith communities and providers alongside young people with lived experience.

1. Discover

2024-2025

OVERVIEW

Map the system and ground that map based on the lived experiences of the people closest to it.

DELIVERABLE

Landscape Study, Journey Map and Stakeholder Map.

KEY FINDINGS & ASSETS

250+ hours of research across 75+ sources and 10 hours with Tennessee youth.

LEVERAGE POINTS

- Supportive adult relationships
- Safe and affordable housing
- Accessible mental health care

2. Design

2025

OVERVIEW

Turn leverage points into an investable structure, with a theory of change, a measurement framework and a capital pathway built before capital moves.

DELIVERABLE

Impact Case: Pathways to Impact theory of change, measurement framework and capital pathway.

KEY FINDINGS & ASSETS

Measurement aligned with assessment tools DCS already uses; a five-part selection tool; two prioritized pilots — the Reconstruct Challenge and Lumen Flats.

3. Deploy

Opened fall 2025 • pilots from March 2026

OVERVIEW

Fund multiple pilots at once, on the explicit expectation that not all of them will work as initially designed.

DELIVERABLE

Reconstruct Challenge: Thriving Youth, with six funded 12-month pilots at $100,000 each.

KEY FINDINGS & ASSETS

58 applications from 11 states; $1.5 million from 16 funders; five ventures continuing and one concluded through a responsible exit.

SCAN TO READ THE FULL REPORT

LANDSCAPE STUDY

IMPACT CASE

RECONSTRUCT PLAYBOOK

Inside Deploy: The Reconstruct Challenge

RECONSTRUCT CHALLENGE

Discover and Design built the case for change. Deploy invited solutions to serve young people aging out of care.

THE RECONSTRUCT CHALLENGE IN NUMBERS

$1.5M	58	6	$100K	$300K
RAISED IN TOTAL	PROPOSED SOLUTIONS	VENTURES PILOTING	PER VENTURE	FOLLOW-ON CAPITAL POOL • TO COME

What it is

Originated by Access Ventures, the Reconstruct Challenge is a reverse-pitch philanthropy challenge. Instead of a traditional grant call, it publishes a research-grounded problem statement and asks innovators how they would solve it in a defined community. It backs several bets at once, knowing not every test will succeed, so philanthropy carries the risk traditional funders avoid.

How it runs

Pilot: 12 months of testing in the community, against indicators co-developed with each venture, with light reporting.

Growth capital: follow-on funding for ventures whose pilots prove feasible and impactful, with a scale model, a named payer and a path to sustain delivery.

The selection committee reflected the ecosystem itself, with more than 20 reviewers drawn from across government, philanthropy, service providers, community organizations and lived experience.

How Ventures Were Selected

The 58 proposals came from nonprofits, social enterprises and technology startups. Every proposal was assessed against five criteria:

Need & Alignment

Deep systemic insight, exemplary alignment with identified needs and goals, and solutions co-designed with youth/stakeholders.

Impact & Evidence

Robust evidence of transformative outcomes with meaningful KPIs.

Feasibility & Compliance

Highly ready, clear budget, compliant and clear capacity to execute.

Scalability & Innovation

Transformative and replicable statewide.

Experience & Stability

Long-standing, financially strong, and experienced organization with diversified revenue and demonstrated ability to endure beyond initial funding.

RECONSTRUCT PLAYBOOK

Public Leadership, Private Risk Capital

This work began with public leadership. The Governor's Faith-Based and Community Initiative, through Every Child Tennessee, provided the mandate, and two state appropriation grants, alongside private gifts, funded the Discover and Design phases. The Reconstruct Challenge and all six pilots are funded by private philanthropy. Public and private dollars laid the groundwork; private risk capital is testing what to build on it. All of the capital invested in Tennessee is leveraged toward honest learning and impact for foster youth.

WHAT WE MEAN BY "PILOT"

In public systems, a pilot often means a small program run until funding ends. Here it means something more deliberate: a 12-month implementation with defined indicators, independent evaluation at mid-term and close, and permission to adapt quickly. Each pilot ends in a decision: continue, adapt, expand or conclude responsibly. Test boldly, but do no harm: every decision protects the young people who rely on the service.

A PROVEN MODEL, NEW TO TENNESSEE

The Reconstruct Challenge Playbook sets out the model in full from Access Ventures, with lessons from past challenges.

Access Ventures has run this model before, on housing insecurity (2019), barriers to employment (2022) and health equity (2023). Past grantees, including mRelief and PadSplit, went on to raise significant follow-on capital and expand into multiple states.

2019
Housing insecurity

2022
Barriers to employment

2023
Health equity

2026
Thriving Youth, Tennessee



The Power of Partnership

This work exists because partners who rarely sit at the same table chose to sit there together, and stayed. The mid-term review names responsive state leadership as a central enabling condition, with public partners who "actively convened, informed and responded to the challenge, rather than participating only as external stakeholders." The Governor's Faith-Based and Community Initiative, through Every Child Tennessee, gave the work its mandate, and the Tennessee Department of Children's Services grounded every stage in how the system actually works.

Who did what

Each core partner played a distinct role in making this work possible.

GOVERNOR'S FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVE (GFBCI), EVERY CHILD TENNESSEE (ECTN) AND THE TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES (TN DCS)

PUBLIC LEADERSHIP AND CONVENING

Provided the public mandate for the work, brought partners into the room, gave the initiative standing with the state, convened community stakeholders and helped ground the work in real operational reality.

BELMONT UNIVERSITY, THROUGH BELMONT INNOVATION LABS

INSTITUTIONAL BACKBONE AND INNOVATION DESIGN FACILITATION

Provided the institutional home for the work and the structured innovation design pathway, the SOLVE 3D model, that has carried it from research through to funded pilots.

ACCESS VENTURES

CATALYTIC CAPITAL AND DEPLOYMENT DESIGN

Originated the model for the Reconstruct Challenge: Thriving Youth, shaped how solutions would be deployed and funded ahead of launch, anchored the funding round as its largest single funder and acts as custodian of the grants.

RELATIV IMPACT

IMPACT MEASUREMENT, MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION

Co-author of the SOLVE 3D model and research partner, providing evaluation, impact measurement and management at every step of the process.

ESSENTIAL INNOVATIONS

VENTURE ENGAGEMENT AND RECONSTRUCT CHALLENGE IMPLEMENTATION

Runs implementation of the Reconstruct Challenge and holds the regular working relationship with the participating ventures.

ECOSYSTEM ENGAGEMENT

Young people, legislators, funders, participating ventures, service providers, community and faith groups, educators, employers and Transition Youth Executive Council members Contributed lived experience, authority, resources, delivery capability and relationships across every stage of the work.

Partnership Ethos You Can See in the Pilots

Across the portfolio, DCS teams and community partners opened referral routes, shared operational knowledge and stayed at the table to problem-solve friction, challenges or blockers to progress.

Built into everyday practice in Chattanooga

Chambliss Center for Children is embedding Connect Our Kids' relationship mapping into its quarterly service plans, so finding supportive adults becomes part of routine casework rather than an add-on.

A bridge to college

Forward Steps has built 15 referral relationships, with DCS independent living specialists, Youth Villages and campus foster care liaisons across Tennessee. A caseworker who meets a young person interested in college can now refer them to a mentor and navigator who carries them from application through enrollment.

A path to a home of their own

Jonathan's Path works with partners to move young people from first contact to move-in in about a week.

REFERRAL-BASED RESOURCE NAVIGATION.

Each new pathway strengthens the network around young people: DCS caseworkers have more places to refer, and ventures like Forward Steps and Jonathan's Path help youth navigate resources at critical moments of transition.



UNDER ONE ROOF AT LUMEN FLATS

Two ventures and the state work side by side. Elmington Elevates provides the housing and stipend, TN Voices provides a peer specialist and therapist on site, and two DCS case managers provide on-site support.

HUD and Knoxville's Community Development Corporation converted Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) vouchers into project-based vouchers tied to this 18-unit apartment complex for 20 years. This novel model has the potential to inform policy nationally.

What We Are Learning and Changing

Shared tables need clear roles.

Partners did not always understand venture support, performance and decision rights in the same way. We are defining a clearer shared operating model.

Everyone needs to see the work.

Delivery was more visible to operational partners than to funders. Monthly portfolio reporting and quarterly in-person deep dives close the gap moving forward.

Different partners have different objectives.

The state, funders and ventures each need different evidence to apply to decision-making for achieving their goals. Future challenges will agree on those needs, and what success, adaptation and exit look like, before launch.

Access is part of the intervention.

Referral routes, permissions and introductions to the right teams take time, especially for ventures new to Tennessee. We will build them earlier.

WHAT PARTNERS ARE SAYING



IN THEIR WORDS

"Universities have a unique responsibility to pair research with innovation in ways that generate meaningful public impact. We are helping build a model that doesn't simply study complex challenges. It designs, tests, measures and scales solutions that can improve lives."

DR. GREG JONES · President, Belmont University

"Transparency breeds confidence.... Even if it's not working, it breeds confidence that there is this open willingness to be able to course correct."

FUNDER

Momentum Beyond the Pilots

Part of the beauty of this work is what we notice beyond the intended results: the energy this group generates both feeds, and is fed by, momentum already building across the community. In the same period, Tennessee also extended foster care services to age 23 thanks to significant advocacy work of the DCS Independent Living staff. This initiative did not produce these changes and does not claim them, but they were driven in part by the same people, and they have changed the environment the pilots operate in. We celebrate these incredible milestones!



MEDIA COVERAGE

Statewide attention on aging out

Statewide and local news coverage on multiple outlets drew public attention to young people aging out of care.

A HIGHER EDUCATION

A foster-friendly university

Belmont helped Every Child Tennessee develop a Foster-Friendly University certification, committing universities to support youth aging out of care and faculty and staff who want to foster. It rolls out statewide this year.





ART

Stories made visible

A commissioned artwork by Wayne Brezinka, built from the stories and belongings of former foster youth and displayed on The Nashville Sign.

PODCAST

Aging Out, from Fracture to Flourish

Bryce Butler and Access Ventures explore what it takes for young people leaving foster care to flourish.





Six Investments in Tennessee's Young People

A portfolio, not a single bet.

Venture capital has long understood something the social sector is only beginning to embrace: when you fund what has never been tried, you do not pick one winner. You back several promising ideas at once, knowing that not every test will succeed. The Reconstruct Challenge: Thriving Youth brings that logic to foster care. Six ventures received first-mile capital to test new approaches to supportive relationships, stable housing and mental health care in Tennessee, with the explicit expectation, set before any funds moved, that pilot success would be variable: some pilots would prove ready to scale and endure, others would pivot and adapt and some would conclude through a responsible exit.

A central value of a portfolio is the learning across it.

Each venture enters Tennessee's ecosystem at a different point, from kin and family networks and housing to college campuses, mental health care and frontline casework, and each has already adapted to what it found there. Together, they show us where the ecosystem holds, where it breaks and what it takes to strengthen it.



NEW CAPITAL, NEW SOLUTIONS, BUILT IN TENNESSEE

New risk capital for an overlooked issue.

16 funders built a $1.5 million fund for interventions untested in Tennessee, and all of it is new to foster care in this form, including a $500,000 anchor commitment from Louisville-based Access Ventures.

New solutions came to Tennessee.

The Reconstruct Challenge drew 58 applications from 11 states. Connect Our Kids and Forward Steps bring models proven elsewhere to Tennessee for the first time, and Lumen Flats is a first-of-its-kind housing model.

Tennessee innovators are scaling.

Jonathan's Path, TN Voices and Elmington Elevates are Tennessee-based organizations testing new models at home.

A housing first model with national reach.

At Lumen Flats, Ben Brewer worked with HUD and Knoxville's Community Development Corporation to convert Foster Youth to Independence vouchers, normally issued to individuals who are often turned away by landlords, into project-based vouchers tied to this 18-unit apartment complex for 20 years. The approach could help unlock more of the $38 million in FYI funding available nationally.[7]

Relationships

Connect Our Kids

Proven nationally, new to Tennessee · Falls Church, VA · Piloting in Nashville (Family & Children's Services) and Chattanooga (Chambliss Center for Children)



JENNIFER JACOBS
CEO & Co-Founder



HEATHER HUGHEY
Chief Operating Officer

THE QUESTION

Can a nationally proven kinship-mapping platform reliably increase the number of supportive adults identified around each young person in Tennessee, and do those connections last?

$100K

WHAT IT FUNDS

Family Connections licenses and People Search for both partner sites, staff training, Quick Start back-office search support, Connect Our Kids University courses, HEERO youth workshops (currently paused) and ongoing coaching and outcome measurement.

STRATEGIC LEARNING

Partner staff bandwidth is the binding constraint, since neither partner has anyone paid specifically for mapping.

Connect Our Kids responded with Quick Start back-office support, and Chambliss is embedding the tool into quarterly service plans. Technology earns its place when it gives time back to relationships.

TARGET END PAYER

A future license could be supported through public or partner funding.





EARLY SIGNALS

(as of July 2026)

20/50

relationship maps created against the pilot target

7.5

connections identified per young person

- 20 relationship maps created against a 50-map pilot target, averaging 7.5 connections per young person. Supportive adults confirmed are far fewer, rising from 0 per young person in March to 2 in September.
- Two delivery routes are being compared side by side: partner staff doing their own mapping and Connect Our Kids doing the search as back-office support.

FROM TENNESSEE

In Chattanooga, a map surfaced a young person's half-brother no one had mentioned. The two connected within hours and are now building a relationship.

Housing · Relationships · Mental Health

Elmington Elevates

New model, first site · Nashville, TN · Piloting at Lumen Flats, Knoxville



BEN BREWER
President



SYDNEY BUTLER
Sr. Finance Associate



LAUREN FIELDER
Executive Assistant

THE QUESTION

Can affordable housing, voluntary on-site programming and a monthly living stipend move young adults toward independence, and are the economics replicable at other Tennessee sites?

$100K

WHAT IT FUNDS

Therapists for services TennCare does not cover, education and life-skills programming and monthly living stipends for residents who choose to participate.

STRATEGIC LEARNING

Grace paired with accountability works. Mentoring shifted from formal pairings to organic shared meals with City Hills Church. As residents progress, with 5 taking new jobs during the period, the pilot is also learning how rent set at 30 percent of income can discourage residents from earning more or reporting it.

TARGET END PAYER

For Lumen, project-based FYI vouchers already commit federal rental assistance for 20 years. Philanthropic partners provide the wraparound support, programming and monthly living stipends for residents.



LUMEN FLATS • KNOXVILLE

An 18-unit apartment complex where two ventures and the state work under one roof.



EARLY SIGNALS (as of July 2026)

12/18
units occupied

11
residents in continued education or employment.

$173K
per unit, against $220–250K for a new build

- A structural first: HUD and Knoxville's Community Development Corporation converted Foster Youth to Independence vouchers, normally issued to individuals who are often turned away by landlords, into project-based vouchers tied to this 18-unit apartment complex for 20 years.
- Residents receive an average of $962 in rental assistance plus a $400 stipend per month. This monthly rental assistance, over the 20 year FYI voucher commitment, equates to over $5.5 million in subsidy for the residents that will live at Lumen.

FROM TENNESSEE

Nearly every resident missed their first month's rent. Each got a conversation rather than a notice, and every one of them paid in month two. Engagement in on-site mental health services rose from 0% to 100% of residents in two months.

Relationships · Mental Health

Forward Steps

Proven in Colorado, new to Tennessee · Boulder, CO · Piloting in Chattanooga, Nashville, Knoxville and the greater Tennessee Valley



JENNIFER FALKOSKI
Executive Director



NICOLE JONES FLYNN
Guardian Scholars Program Manager

THE QUESTION

Can a supportive adult relationship, delivered through a Colorado-proven combination of one-to-one mentoring, financial support and resource navigation, help foster-experienced students in Tennessee enroll, persist and complete credits?

$100K

WHAT IT FUNDS

Market entry and recruitment across Chattanooga, Nashville and Knoxville, up to $6,000 per scholar per academic year, a part-time local Scholar Mentor and a SaaS platform for virtual mentoring and resource navigation.

STRATEGIC LEARNING

Mentoring and resource navigation drive the results; scholars consistently rate their mentor the most valuable component. Entering a new state takes presence: partnerships were built through three in-person trips, and the team chose to hire a local mentor rather than outsource the role.

TARGET END PAYER

Tennessee corporate or foundation funders and mentor co-funding with local partners.



Reporting period is Mar 1 – July 31, 2026

EARLY SIGNALS

(as of July 2026)

12/6
applications for places in the first cohort

15
referral relationships against a period target of 6

~20
more eligible students identified at Chattanooga State

- Demand outpaced capacity: 12 applications for 6 places in the first cohort, which begins in September 2026.
- 15 referral relationships built against a period target of 6, spanning Youth Villages, Chattanooga State, Tennessee Tech, Cleveland State, Belmont, MTSU, the Chambliss Center and DCS independent living specialists.
- Chattanooga State alone has identified roughly 20 more eligible students for the fall.



FROM PROVEN WORK IN OTHER MARKETS

Across five academic years in Colorado, 96 percent of eligible Guardian Scholars earned a degree or certificate, with year-on-year retention between 85 and 95 percent. These are the kinds of results we will look for in Tennessee; the first retention data arrives in January 2027.

SUPPORTIVE ADULTS

100%
of scholars reported that having a mentor helped them do better in school

91%
of scholars reported that having a mentor helped them deal with challenges they faced outside of school

91%
of scholars reported that their mentor supported them in attaining their goals for the semester

Housing Relationships

Jonathan's Path

Operating and scaling across Middle Tennessee



CARRIE DURARD
Founder &
Executive Director



JULEESIA SANTIAGO-KARIM
Program Director



KARISSA PEARLSTONE
Development Director



BROOKE GOODSON
Housing Manager

THE QUESTION

Can a housing continuum based on readiness, not age, keep young people stably housed through the transition to adulthood, at a lower cost than traditional models of care?



$100K

WHAT IT FUNDS

$60,000 goes toward launching Path Home through a down payment and initial setup. $30,000 supports Path Forward and Path Beyond, the phases designed to scale without capital costs, including move-in costs, rental guarantees, and stabilization assistance. The remaining $10,000 builds program capacity through the Housing Manager role, which coordinates placements and supports youth as they move between phases.

STRATEGIC LEARNING

Removing barriers doesn't mean doing it alone, it means owning the path forward. By directly addressing barriers while coordinating with trusted partners, including DCS, TAK, therapy providers, and other community resources, we can move quickly without simply referring a young person elsewhere and hoping the connection happens. That approach is what makes outcomes like a 7-day move-in possible. As Path Home placements begin alongside state contracting, these partnerships reinforce a key learning: a strong housing continuum requires both responsive execution and a connected system of support.

TARGET END PAYER

Path Home is sustained by public funding, diversified private funding, and growing equity that can be leveraged to finance the next home. Our core model stays constant while community partners adapt by county, supported by a team onboarding and training program in development and new community partners for future Path Forward homes.

Reporting period is Mar 1 - July 31, 2026



EARLY SIGNALS

(as of July 2026)

100%

of young people in Path Beyond are stably housed

83%

of youth in Path Forward transitioned to Path Beyond

7 days

average from first contact to move-in, against a 30-day goal

365

Path Line calls against a 175 target

- 28 young people are actively placed in Path Forward and Path Beyond.
- Path Forward and Path Beyond run at an estimated $2,500 direct cost per young person per year, against an $18,000–$22,000 national benchmark. (Brookings, USDA data.)
- Path Home is the first program in Tennessee to let young people stay past 18 based on readiness, not age.

> "I can't imagine my life without it because I may very well be dead without them."

Cain, who with stable housing at Jonathan's Path is enrolled in a job and career readiness program, has access to medical and mental health care, and is reconnecting with his community.

FROM TENNESSEE

Two young women in the first Path Forward home moved into their own apartments. They advanced within four months, with driver's licenses, cars, stable jobs, and savings accounts.

Mental Health · Relationships

TN Voices

New model, first site · Goodlettsville, TN · Piloting at Lumen Flats, Knoxville, alongside Elmington Elevates



KRISTEN DAVIS
Chief Innovation Officer



WILL VOSS
Chief Operations Officer



TAMMY BASS
Program Director



FIONA HALL
UpFrom CEO

THE QUESTION

Does embedding trauma-informed therapy, lived-experience peer support and a digital wellness platform in a housing site, all on an opt-in basis, increase access to mental health care and connection to trusted adults?

$100K

WHAT IT FUNDS

An EMDR-trained therapist on site at Lumen Flats, a Certified Young Adult Peer Support Specialist, smartphones preloaded with the UpFrom wellness platform, participation incentives and trauma-informed training for housing staff.



STRATEGIC LEARNING

Engagement with mental health care depends on trust. Every attendee at the first group session had had a difficult past experience with therapy. The team leads with peer contact within 24 hours of move-in and introduces the app only once trust is established. It also learned that the incentive needs to arrive before the app download, not after.

TARGET END PAYER

TennCare, Tennessee's Medicaid program, is the most direct long-term payer. Young people who age out of foster care may be eligible for TennCare coverage through age 26, so the system that already covers them could sustain the care. The path runs through TennCare billing for therapy and eligible peer support, subject to a rate uplift for EMDR and peer work. TN Voices has done this before: it made Family Support Specialist services billable through TennCare in 2014, and it serves all 95 Tennessee counties.



EARLY SIGNALS

(as of July 2026)

11
residents enrolled in some aspect of the pilot

5
residents opted into ongoing therapy after one session

17%
first-time therapy engagement against a 75% target

- After a single therapist-led group session, five residents opted into ongoing therapy.
- First-time therapy engagement stands at 17 percent against a 75 percent target, and 2 of 12 residents had identified a trusted adult within 90 days. Trust is being built, and it takes time.

FROM TENNESSEE

"I have never had a therapist actually talk to me without typing notes or being distracted."

A LUMEN FLATS RESIDENT AFTER A FIRST SESSION

Relationships · Mental Health

New Culture: A Responsible Exit

New model, first site · Nashville, TN · Piloting at Lumen Flats, Knoxville

What we learned together

This was vital learning for both New Culture and the conveners. One key insight: an out-of-state venture needs significant time to understand the operating context, build trust and learn the local landscape before deploying a solution. That early engagement is essential.

What happened?

New Culture scoped sites, built partnerships and finalized the Navigator role, which participating teams initially received warmly. As implementation progressed, the venture found that the model required more time to establish referral pathways and clarify how the Navigator role would fit within existing youth engagement practices. The pilot was also designed for 14- to 17-year-olds, while the other five ventures focused on young adults and worked within settings where youth engagement practices were already established. After four months without sufficient referral activity to support implementation, New Culture identified the key barriers and, following a July working session, chose not to move forward on August 19, 2026.

We are grateful to New Culture for its commitment to Tennessee's young people, and for the candor and care it brought to naming its own blockers and choosing to step back.

WHY THEY JOINED

To show that when systems use authentic youth engagement in key spaces like Child and Family Team Meetings, well-being indicators improve for young people as they transition to adulthood.

WHAT WAS BEING TESTED

Whether a Youth Navigator with lived expertise could strengthen young people's voice in, and satisfaction with, their Child and Family Team Meetings, the pivotal space where their permanency plans and services are decided.



What works in one context does not always transfer to the next.

New Culture's model has a strong record in Arizona. Tennessee's workforce structures, age ranges and referral routes asked something different of it. Assessing market fit is part of what a pilot is for, and this one answered that question early.

Partner capacity and positioning shape what is possible.

A new model needs a local partner with the capacity to champion it and a clear position alongside what Tennessee already offers. Ventures and our team will confirm both together before or during launch.

An early exit is the model working.

The Reconstruct Challenge exists to fund early-stage, untested possibilities, so an outcome like this is expected, and it has surfaced in every cohort.

It was caught early

Clear indicators showed the lack of progress, and bringing the ventures together in person at the four-to-five-month mark created the space to dig into barriers honestly.

It was prudent

New Culture used $7,500 of its $100,000 award, on consulting fees only. The unspent funds were redeployed to the follow-on capital pool.

The first phase did its job.

First-mile capital closes the first-dollar gap on new solutions. Here it showed, quickly and affordably, that a design viable in principle didn't work in this context.

The partnership held

Every partner handled the wind-down with care, leaving both the venture and the convening team with real learning.

A CROSS PORTFOLIO ASSET

Young people aging out of care need to stay connected to the people who support them. Adapting a program it built in Arizona, OCJ Kids provides phones, wireless service with local Tennessee numbers and technical support through its T-Mobile partnership. Every Child Tennessee partner agencies and DCS will be able to utilize this resource for the youth they are already working with. Additional capital raised after launch created this new opening for further innovation and investment. During the second half of the Reconstruct Challenge, the collaborating team will bring this asset into the portfolio, support its implementation and evaluate it. OCJ Kids launches in the Tennessee market on October 1, 2026, with evaluation and data forthcoming in the final report.


12

Meet, Stella.

Stella came to Path Forward Home as one of the original three young women in the house — employed, but with no license, no transportation, and no bank account, working toward EMT training.

Starting in October 2025, Jonathan's Path invested in Uber rides for Stella to work. It then invested in driving lessons and car insurance (February 2026), work scrubs and Ubers to job interviews. After she broke house rules and couldn't stay in the Path Forward Home, the team didn't let her fall out of the program. Instead, they cleared her guarantor barrier to secure her own apartment and moved her into Path Beyond, covering furniture, a bed frame and rent. By April 2026, she'd bought EMT school study materials. In total, Jonathan's Path spent $5,561.74 over 9 months, across 27 separate transactions, to move her from instability to a stable home, a job and a path toward EMT certification.

AN "AHA" OR BREAKTHROUGH MOMENT:

The guarantor-barrier workaround with Stella is the breakthrough moment — when she broke house rules and would have otherwise lost support entirely, the team didn't discharge her; they solved the barrier and moved her forward. That's the real-world proof behind our belief that "the relationship is the intervention".

Jonathan's Path discovered that handling missed rent supportively instead of as a formal eviction protects both the housing placement and the young person's rental record — a deliberate policy choice that's now core to how Path Forward operates, not just a one-off accommodation.

Jonathan's Path

Catalytic Capital Fuels Social Innovation

This fund has already delivered its first return: a live portfolio, new capacity in a stretched system and learning that is changing how Tennessee develops solutions for young people. Catalytic capital from multiple investors made this work possible.

A $1.5 million fund, built by 16 funders.

The Reconstruct Challenge: Thriving Youth brought together many different sources of capital: foundations, families and individuals, many of whom gave through donor-advised funds. The raise took about 18 months, and every gift mattered.

Catalytic capital on the front end.

Louisville-based Access Ventures, our lead investor, committed a $500,000 gift to the fund. That commitment was the proof point. It gave the partners confidence to launch, and it gave other funders the confidence to come in behind it.

A challenge to close the gap.

With $375,000 still needed to reach the full goal, one family put up a challenge gift covering half of the gap and invited friends and family to join them. Eight more funders came to the table to meet the challenge together. This additional $375,000, raised after the initial launch, both expanded the capital available to grow promising solutions and made room to test an additional concept: a cross-venture asset that closes an important gap in the ecosystem.

New players, new mindsets.

Each gift brought a new player into this cause, and these funders were courageous enough to go first, backing ideas untested in Tennessee before the evidence existed. This is a different way of thinking about capital: funding the first real-world test of an idea, expecting that not every pilot will succeed and counting the learning as a return.



"Through a blended-capital strategy, philanthropy has the opportunity to de-risk innovation, attract additional investment and accelerate solutions that traditional funding models often cannot support."

BRYCE BUTLER

Access Ventures

Three Capital Stories

A key insight from our evaluation is that there are three capital stories we want to track and tell through the Reconstruct Challenge: capital used, capital unlocked for young people and capital attracted. In the second half of the pilot year, we will focus on telling them.

STORY 1

Capital used

What the grants paid for.

EARLY EXAMPLES

Six pilots funded through first-mile grants, with the remainder held in reserve for a growth round.

STORY 2

Capital unlocked for young people

Resources that now reach young people because of the pilots.

EARLY EXAMPLES

Project-based FYI vouchers committing federal rental assistance at Lumen Flats for 20 years; living stipends and direct financial help to young people.

STORY 3

Capital attracted

New funding drawn to the Foster Care space by the pilots.

EARLY EXAMPLES

Emerging as ventures pursue additional capital.

FROM FIRST-MILE TO LAST-MILE CAPITAL

PHASE 1: Like a family or seed round

First-mile capital

True first-dollar risk capital. $100,000 grants test new ideas in Tennessee and carry them from idea to proof.

PHASE 2: Like a Series A

Last-mile capital

A limited $300K+ follow-on pool closes the gap for promising pilots, moving them toward market adoption and a secured payer.

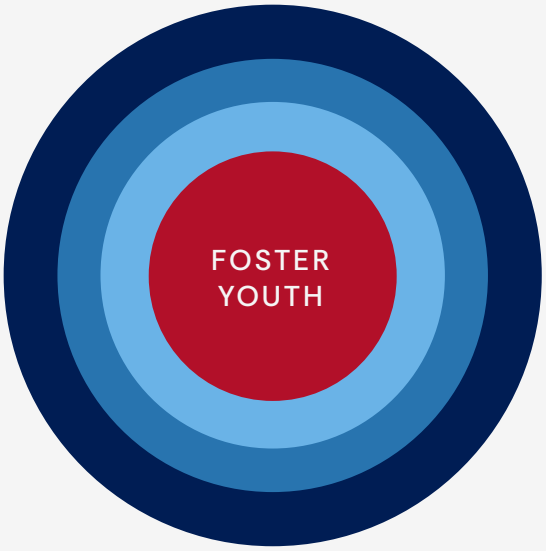
THE LEARNING RETURN.

The most valuable return on risk capital is often the insight it buys: what works in this context, what it costs, what the system needs to make room for it and what to stop doing. That insight shapes the next dollar, from this fund and from others, and it is applied in real time rather than at the end of a grant.



Honest Learnings

Telling the truth about what we are seeing is the point of this work, from our perspective. This section leads with the independent mid-term evaluation's findings followed by our reflection on what these findings reveal.



Mid-term evaluation

We invested in a mid-term evaluator, Relativ Impact, seeking direct and prudent feedback from our stakeholders. The review assessed the work at three levels: the wider Ecosystem Innovation Journey, the Reconstruct Challenge: Thriving Youth and the pilots themselves.[1] The youth are at the center, always. Our final report will include emerging youth outcomes and youth voice after pilots have operated in market for twelve months.

LEVEL 1: THE ECOSYSTEM INNOVATION JOURNEY

LEVEL 2: THE RECONSTRUCT CHALLENGE

LEVEL 3: THE PILOTS

The Ecosystem Innovation Journey

INSIGHT		ACTION
The enabling conditions for system change are in place: a shared definition of the problem, cross-sector legitimacy and three agreed leverage points.	→	Sustain them as the platform for continued testing.
Complementary partnerships made this possible: a public mandate, an institutional home, structured facilitation and operational grounding from the child welfare agency.	→	Treat the Transition Youth Executive Council as a durable asset beyond the pilot year.
The journey successfully bridged design into funded pilots.	→	Preserve that continuity from insight to action in future journeys.
The direct perspectives of young people and practitioners are not yet represented in this phase of evaluation at the depth this work requires.	→	Conduct a survey deployed across all cohorts at the end of the 12 months, with conclusions treated as provisional until then.

RELATIV

The Reconstruct Journey: Insight in Action

INSIGHT		ACTION
The Reconstruct Challenge turned three priorities into a live, funded portfolio.	→	Report capital utilization alongside what it produced and shine a light on the true cost of what it takes.
The Reconstruct Challenge has added practical capacity to a system under growing demand: DCS now has more places to refer young people.	→	Keep the additional capacity visible in portfolio reporting and verify it in the final evaluation.
Uneven performance is expected in a risk-capital portfolio, but not every stakeholder interprets non-performance the same way.	→	Make learning expectations, decision and performance standards explicit.
Selection was credible in design but compressed in execution.	→	Allow more time for due diligence, context testing and indicator design for follow-on capital and in future Reconstruct Challenges.
The evidence architecture has not yet kept pace with delivery, partly because portfolio-wide indicators were still settling when ventures were selected.	→	Agreed for the second half: continue with a small number of traceable measures per venture, focused on the funded intervention, with cost and scale models separating setup from ongoing delivery, and the common youth and practitioner surveys.
Delivery was more visible to operational partners than to funders, and partners understood the venture support model differently.	→	Define a clearer shared operating model with regular portfolio-level reporting to all stakeholders.
Evidence expectations differ because stakeholders are making different decisions.	→	Design the evidence around the decision each stakeholder needs to make.
Payer pathways must be developed during the pilot, not after it, and each venture's payer is different; there is no single follow-on route for the portfolio.	→	Name a prospective payer and evidence threshold for each venture now.
Responsible discontinuation has been tested once, successfully: early, at low cost, with learning documented.	→	Build exit and continuity plans for every venture.

The Pilots: Solutions in TN

INSIGHT		ACTION
Context fit and institutional access are central to feasibility.	→	Test context and map model access dependencies before launch.
Relationships and access matter as much as funding: local partners, permissions, referral routes and time to build trust.	→	Build access routes early, especially for ventures new to Tennessee.
Portfolio variation reflects different levels of maturity.	→	Match venture support to maturity and complexity.
Participant continuity is central to responsible piloting.	→	Communicate engagement timelines from the start and plan continuity for every young person engaged, whatever a pilot's decision.
Integrated models make it hard to know which components drive outcomes.	→	Ask young people and practitioners which components they value most.
Early signals are promising but not yet proof of attributable long-term outcomes.	→	Show that each pilot reliably delivers a mechanism existing research links to stability (a trusted adult, a stable home, access to mental health care), report progress as description and plan longer-term follow-up beyond the 12-month mark.
Young people choosing to engage, and staying, is early evidence of value.	→	Continue to explore and report participation and retention as evidence of perceived value.
Collaboration is strongest where it is built into everyday operational delivery and led by the ventures.	→	Design for routine, operational collaboration from contracting.

OUR REFLECTION

Rigor and Relationship, Held Together.

Read side by side, the evaluation's findings point to two things this work cannot do without.

THE FIRST

Trusting relationships

The research that launched this work found that one caring adult is the strongest single predictor of stability for young people leaving care, and trust has proven decisive at every level of the ecosystem: with young people, with frontline teams, between ventures and the system and among partners.

> Relationship without rigor risks goodwill without proof.

THE SECOND

Rigorous evaluation

Making learnings visible and translating them into explicit decisions about what to strengthen, adapt, or grow enables better outcomes for young people. Clearly defined venture KPIs, reviewed monthly, will create a disciplined rhythm of continuous learning, smart adaptation and sustained focus on results.

> Rigor without relationship risks measuring services ecosystem players will never engage with.



The Risks We're Taking

Risk capital implies taking risks on purpose. As part of this interim evaluation, we are surfacing the risks we see at this point, and how we will manage the portfolio's risk profile through the second half of the Reconstruct Challenge: Thriving Youth.

Outcomes cannot yet be attributed to the pilots

WHY IT MATTERS

No baseline was taken, there is no comparison group, numbers are small and the extension of foster care to 23 is changing outcomes at the same time. Most relationship and stability measures also need a longer follow-up window.

HOW WE MANAGE IT

Reporting progress as description, not causation; defining traceable intermediate measures; grounding claims in mechanism delivery; planning longer-term follow-up.

Some pilots may not find a next payer

WHY IT MATTERS

Several next-payer relationships are still underdeveloped, and there is a limited pool of $300K+ in follow-on capital through the Reconstruct fund.

HOW WE MANAGE IT

Naming a prospective payer and evidence threshold for each venture, and starting payer conversations now.

Bundled models are hard to unpack

WHY IT MATTERS

Integrated support fits young people's lives but makes it hard to know which component drives results.

HOW WE MANAGE IT

Asking young people and practitioners which components they would not want to be without.

Costs are not yet clear

WHY IT MATTERS

Setup costs are not yet separated from ongoing delivery costs, so replication costs are uncertain.

HOW WE MANAGE IT

Building a defensible cost and value case for each venture.



IN THEIR WORDS • REFLECTING ON RECONSTRUCT

"If the system is a leaky bucket, we are trying to plug all the holes."

JENNIFER JACOBS, CEO & Co-Founder, Connect Our Kids

Urban success may not travel

WHY IT MATTERS

Most pilots operate in cities. Transport, workforce and participant density differ in rural Tennessee.

HOW WE MANAGE IT

Treating rural access as a design question from the start of any expansion.

Young people rely on what we build

WHY IT MATTERS

A pilot may conclude, but a young person's home, therapist or mentor cannot simply disappear.

HOW WE MANAGE IT

Continuity plans for every young person engaged, whatever the pilot's decision.

Variable pilot success

WHY IT MATTERS

Success of venture pilots will be variable, and one has already concluded.

HOW WE MANAGE IT

Transparent decision standards applied consistently across the portfolio.

Youth voice in the evidence

WHY IT MATTERS

Conclusions remain provisional until young people's direct perspectives are gathered in depth.

HOW WE MANAGE IT

Central, ethically gathered youth surveys in the second half.



What Comes Next

Between now and March 2027, every venture will turn implementation into evidence and arrive at a clear decision.

MID-TERM REVIEW	APPLY THE LESSONS	FINAL EVALUATION	DECISION & GROWTH ROUND
Mar–Jul 2026	Fall 2026	March 2027	April 2027

Continue

WHEN IT APPLIES

The intervention is operating credibly, but evidence is not yet enough for expansion.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Reporting progress as description, not causation; defining traceable intermediate measures; grounding claims in mechanism delivery; planning longer-term follow-up.

Adapt

WHEN IT APPLIES

The idea remains strong, but the design or operating conditions need material change.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

A revised plan and evidence framework before further testing.

Expand

WHEN IT APPLIES

Delivery is credible, stable costs are understood and a prospective payer is identified.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

A payer-ready case and a next capital request.

Conclude responsibility

WHEN IT APPLIES

The intervention is not feasible or ready enough to justify further investment in its current form.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Young people's continuity is protected and the learning is documented and shared.

Continuation is not the only positive outcome. Clear adaptation, payer preparation and responsible conclusion each demonstrate good stewardship.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Whether each pilot delivered the mechanism it was designed around, who took part, who stayed engaged and what they valued, what it takes to run, what stable delivery costs once setup is separated out and who could pay next. Common youth and practitioner surveys, run centrally, will add comparable experience evidence without adding reporting burden. Payer conversations begin now, because many early-2027 funding decisions are made by November.

From Insight to Informed Action

The journey has created real ecosystem value.

Shared understanding, visibility, trusting relationships and the legitimacy of coordinated testing of new models for young people transitioning from foster care are now in place.

The Reconstruct Challenge: Thriving Youth has moved the work into practical testing.

First-mile capital has established a live portfolio and added services, referral pathways and implementation learning across supportive relationships, stable housing and mental health care.

The evidence journey is underway.

Pilots are early, and their progress is variable. Today's evidence supports claims about delivery of each pilot's intended mechanism, engagement and added capacity, not yet about common or attributable long-term outcomes.

The next period is about informed choices.

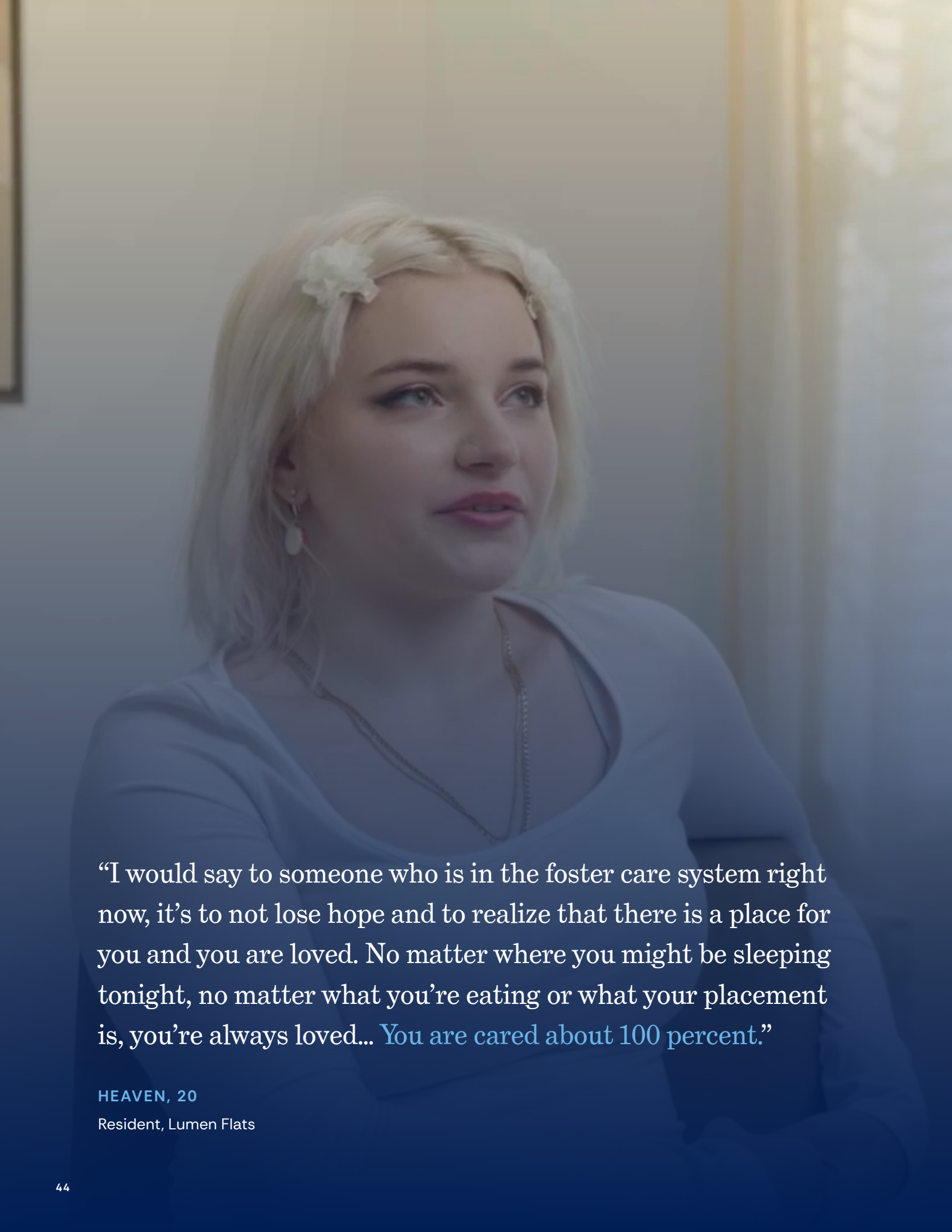
Every pilot will move toward a transparent decision to continue, adapt, expand or conclude responsibly, grounded in emerging evidence, stable costs, implementation conditions and a clear funding pathway.

Durable progress depends on the whole ecosystem.

Public partners, Belmont and its innovation partners, deployment partners, funders, ventures, service providers, communities and young people each hold a distinct part of the pathway to sustained delivery.



A durable response will not come from one program, institution or source of capital. It depends on the whole ecosystem: the combined commitment of public partners, funders, communities, service providers and young people, and on that partnership continuing well beyond the pilot year.



"I would say to someone who is in the foster care system right now, it's to not lose hope and to realize that there is a place for you and you are loved. No matter where you might be sleeping tonight, no matter what you're eating or what your placement is, you're always loved... You are cared about 100 percent."

HEAVEN, 20

Resident, Lumen Flats

Evidence and Resources

This report draws on a mid-term review, not a final evaluation. It covers the first five months (March 1 to July 31, 2026) of 12-month pilots, a point where delivery is underway but outcomes for young people cannot yet be assessed. The review was conducted by Relativ Impact.

Boundaries of the evidence

It is too early to report outcome data. Most relationship and stability indicators require a follow-up window that has not yet elapsed.

Indicator data is venture-reported and not independently verified.

Definitions were still settling during the first period; some indicators were finalized or replaced mid-period.

Two ventures had not begun delivering to young people in Tennessee within the period.

Stories are venture-supplied and illustrate how an approach works rather than establish its effect. Some originate outside Tennessee and are labeled.

No baseline was taken, there is no comparison group and the extension of foster care to 23 took effect in the same period, so progress is described rather than attributed to the pilots.

Ventures test different interventions at different stages and are not compared with one another.

Practitioner perspectives and the direct perspectives of young people are not yet represented at the depth this work requires. Conclusions should be read as provisional until that gap is closed.

Sources

1 Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth (2024) 2024 Youth Transitions Advisory Council annual report. Nashville, TN: Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth. Available at: https://digitaltennessee.tnsos.gov/ccy_annual_reports/14

2 Annie E. Casey Foundation (2019) Future savings: the economic potential of successful transitions from foster care to adulthood. Baltimore, MD: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, The Annie E. Casey Foundation. Available at: https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-futuresavings-2019.pdf. [National estimate of $4.1B per annual cohort (~$178K per young person), applied to Tennessee's ~850 young people leaving care each year; indicative only.]

3 Relativ Impact independent mid-term review (March 1 - July 31, 2026); counted once across ventures.

4 Venture-reported, not independently verified; progress, not outcomes attributable to the pilots

5 Annie E. Casey Foundation (2023), Transition-age youth in foster care: 2023 Tennessee profile, p. 6, as presented in Belmont Innovation Labs (2024), Transitioning to adulthood: foster youth in Tennessee, "At a Glance". Data for young people aged 21 in 2021.

6 Tennessee General Assembly (2025) Public Chapter No. 333 (House Bill 103/Senate Bill 1266): Foster care. 114th General Assembly. Nashville, TN: State of Tennessee. Available at: https://fastdemocracy.com/bill/tn/114/bills/TNB00053823

7 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2026) The Melania Trump Foster Youth to Independence Initiative. Notice PIH 2026-19. Washington, DC: Office of Public and Indian Housing. Available at: https://www.hud.gov/sites/default/files/PIH/documents/PIH-2026-19.pdf

SOURCES NOTES

Stakeholder interviews with implementation partners and system actors; venture check-ins and deep dives; venture indicator data recorded in Monday.com; original Reconstruct Challenge applications; venture-supplied materials; Belmont Innovation Labs' Landscape Study and Impact Case; and discussions with ventures to clarify their indicators.


Belmont
Innovation
Labs


BELMONT
UNIVERSITY