

whatever  
it takes

2022-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN

pathways  
out of  
poverty

ForkKids

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Strategic Context

The mission of ForKids is to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty for families and children. Since 1988, ForKids has worked to accomplish this mission in three areas: housing, critical services, and educational interventions. Today, ForKids assists over 75,000 individuals annually in fourteen cities and counties in Southeastern Virginia. With a commitment to tangible results, ForKids tracks over 50 unique performance measures to ensure the effective, efficient use of resources. On average, 89% of our families attain housing and 92% of our children advance to the next grade.

The agency has grown consistently for three decades and experienced explosive growth over the last 24 months as we deployed critical COVID-19 resources. As the global pandemic enters its third year, families living in poverty have felt its impact most profoundly. Despite massive investments in homelessness prevention nationwide, sky-rocketing housing costs, lost wages, remote learning, and daycare closures have made the day-to-day lives of families living in poverty more precarious and have widened achievement gaps for our children.

Over this same period, ForKids and the entire nation have wrestled with racial injustice after the horrifying death of George Floyd in the spring of 2020. ForKids frontline staff witness daily the impact of systemic racism on our families who are disproportionately people of color. Our Board and staff are committed to expanding our efforts, both internally and externally, to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion through our direct services, operations, advocacy, and governance. We intend to play a vital role in ensuring individuals and families have economic opportunity and equity in all facets of life.

The bright spot in this tumultuous time has been the completion of our \$25 million Campaign ForKids and the construction of two extraordinary new regional centers. The Birdsong Center in Suffolk and The Landmark Center in the South Norfolk community of Chesapeake have more than doubled our educational, service, and shelter capacity. These joyful, light-filled spaces include a Research and Advocacy Center, eight classrooms, an urban orchard, a 24-seat call center, two commercial teaching kitchens, a 20-family shelter, and high-tech, trauma-informed workspaces for our exceptional team. Serving over 3,000 square miles, these two facilities are already transforming our work.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION

There is much more work to do. As we look ahead to the next five years, ForKids has decided to “play the long game.” We know that family transformation and generational impact take years and are not always linear. Acknowledging the systemic barriers our families face, ForKids will enrich programming and lengthen the duration of services to create viable Pathways out of Poverty. With new investments in educational programming, vocational services for adults and children, and expanded economic mobility supports, we are leaning into our mission of breaking the cycle of homelessness and poverty.

To magnify our impact, ForKids will tackle community and systems-level transformation through the work of our new Research and Advocacy Center. By lifting the voices of our families, we will support and inform public policy in the areas of housing affordability, transportation, childcare, and education. The Housing Crisis

Hotline will play an important role to inform this work through regional and community-level data reflecting needs and gaps in service.

To accomplish this work and solve some of the most intransigent problems in our community, we will invest in our most precious asset: our workforce. Through expanded recruiting channels, competitive pay and benefits, staff development and training, and a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, ForKids will attract and retain the talent needed to deliver best-in-class services and build authentic Pathways Out of Poverty.

This ambitious plan is anchored in ForKids' organizational strengths identified through extensive community interviews and stakeholder feedback. According to consultant Michael Anderson, "Although articulated in differing ways by interviewees, ForKids' 'special sauce' - its mix of crisis response, housing, educational, and other wrap-around services for children and parents, combined with the 'whatever it takes' attitude of staff - has engendered respect and trust among its partners, funders, and clients. They're trusted and their expertise is recognized."

ForKids is excited for the future and well-equipped for the road ahead with a results-oriented model, committed investors, skilled partners, a strong Board, and a talented staff. Through disciplined execution and compassionate implementation, the 2022 ForKids Strategic Plan: Pathways Out of Poverty will build strong families, successful children, and a thriving community.

## **OUR PROCESS**

ForKids engaged the services of Michael Anderson Consulting Group in September 2020 after a national search. With this team of consultants, ForKids' leadership team followed a structured process to gather information from key stakeholders including community service providers, funders, Board members, staff, and clients. Over a period of 18 months, a process lengthened by the COVID-19 pandemic, Board and staff worked collaboratively to assess all areas of service delivery and identify areas of opportunity for mission impact. This effort led to the strategic goals, strategies, objectives, and tactics discussed below.

Our implementation plan, including tactics, timelines, deliverables, and responsibilities, will be tracked by management, and reported to the Board of Directors and Strategic Planning Committee on a recurring basis as the plan is accomplished.

# STRATEGIC FOUNDATION

## Mission

Breaking the cycle of homelessness and poverty for families and children

## Vision

We envision a future where all individuals have viable pathways out of poverty and homelessness. Through innovative programs and persistent advocacy, ForKids will break the cycle of homelessness, foster strong families, and help parents gain and maintain safe and stable homes.

## Values

- We believe the future of our community is rooted in securing the future of our children.
- We believe each individual has unique strengths and abilities that can be nurtured so they can achieve self-sufficiency.
- Our families are our full partners in the process of achieving self-sufficiency. We accomplish goals with them, not for them.
- We believe change is a process, not an event. Emergency shelter is not a permanent solution to homelessness.
- We are committed to implementing strategies that dismantle systematic racism and inequity.
- We believe we must be fully accountable for every contribution made to ForKids and wisely use all funds entrusted to us.
- We believe it is our responsibility to educate others about the complex nature of homelessness and advocate for changes in community policies and programs.
- We are committed to delivering services that achieve tangible results. We rigorously and regularly assess our programs, making changes where necessary to improve results.
- As a diverse and inclusive team, we work to address the complex challenges of homelessness through innovative thinking, hard work, and service excellence.

# STRATEGIC GOALS

## I. Community Support

Thriving, resilient communities require housing, education, transportation, and social support systems for all their citizens. ForKids will lead, collaborate, and advocate to build community systems that provide stable housing and viable pathways out of poverty for families and children.

## II. Economic Mobility

Housing affordability and living wage income are inextricably linked. ForKids clients will have opportunities to gain skills of their choice that lead to living wage employment.

## III. Educational Advancement

Children experiencing housing instability are more likely to have educational and developmental delays that impact the trajectory of their lives. ForKids will address the academic and socio-emotional needs of our students to close academic achievement gaps and provide a foundation for vocational success.

## IV. Family Well-Being

Long-term housing instability negatively impacts mental and physical health and disconnects families from their communities. ForKids will positively impact clients' health and social-emotional well-being by delivering evidence-based, trauma-informed services and connecting our families to community resources.

## V. Housing Stability

Safe, decent, affordable housing is essential for families to thrive. ForKids families will attain and retain safe, stable affordable housing.

## VI. Operational Excellence

Solving our community's most challenging problems requires great staff and a robust operational infrastructure. ForKids will cultivate a diverse, high-performance workforce, rigorously assess operations, and optimally deploy resources to achieve our mission.

## STRATEGIES

To achieve organizational Goals and Objectives, ForKids will apply the following strategies in all elements of its work.

- **Lengthen Service Interventions**

Extend client engagement periods and measure goals that indicate long-term client success.

- **Deepen Client-Centered Approaches**

Refine and expand the client-centered approaches to increase opportunities for clients to make their own choices, advocate for themselves, and chart their own courses and paths.

- **Advocate**

Build community systems that provide stable housing and viable pathways out of poverty for families and children.

- **Partner to Expand Opportunities**

Expand resources through collaborative working partnerships. Help families access culturally responsive and individualized services and opportunities by reducing barriers.

- **Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

Implement individual, community, and systems-level strategies to dismantle systemic racism and inequity.

- **Data-Inform All Work**

Collect, analyze, and utilize data to inform service provision and agency operations.

## 5-YEAR GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND TACTICS

Unless otherwise indicated, all targets are to be tracked annually.

### GOAL 1: COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Thriving, resilient communities require housing, education, transportation, and social support systems for all their citizens. ForKids will lead, collaborate, and advocate to build community systems that provide stable housing and viable pathways out of poverty for families and children.

**Objective 1.1:** Effectively advocate to build community infrastructure that supports low-income families.

#### Targets

- 1) Build public will for affordable housing as measured by public opinion surveys conducted by academic partners.
- 2) Develop an advocacy platform and governmental relations action plan by December 2022 with input from local governments.
- 3) Distribute Hotline data and other community analytics to inform public policy through dashboards released quarterly.

#### Tactics

- a. Join with existing federal and state advocacy groups to provide direct local government advocacy to advance the understanding of affordable housing and poverty.
- b. Advocate for the development of a regional, transit-oriented housing plan.
- c. Collaborate with localities and regional organizations to track and disseminate regional housing data.
- d. Evaluate feasibility of providing services in underserved communities in Southeastern Virginia. If feasible, develop and execute the facilities, staffing, and service plan necessary to enter a new market.

**Objective 1.2:** Effectively connect households in crisis to available local resources.

#### Targets

- 1) Answer 75% of calls to the Housing Crisis Hotline (HCH) within 75 seconds.
- 2) Resolve 75% of issues presented to the HCH within two calls.
- 3) Increase unique users of Resources757 by 50%.
- 4) Reduce bounce rate of Resources757 to 25%.

- 5) Receive a 60 or higher Net Promoter score for the HCH based on caller surveys, indicating callers would recommend the service to others in need.
- 6) Receive an 80 or higher Net Promoter Score for Resources757 based on partner surveys.

### **Tactics**

- a. Hotline staff will work with Research and Advocacy team members to identify critical systems gaps and intentionally recruit referral partners that can help to fill the gaps.
- b. Hotline staff will strategically leverage available financial assistance to support low-income families.
- c. Intake Specialists will receive comprehensive ongoing training regarding appropriate referrals and understanding the homeless service process.
- d. Complete regular call monitoring and data quality checks to identify errors and training gaps for Hotline staff.
- e. Coordinate with other referral networks to ensure that Resources757 and the HCH are effectively serving as publicly available resources for low-income residents of the region.
- f. Analyze data regarding traffic to Resources757 website to identify areas of highest need and seek out resources to fill that need.

**Objective 1.3:** Fully utilize the Landmark and Birdsong Centers to support our families, staff, and communities.

### **Targets**

- 1) Kitchens produce and serve an average of 750 meals per week and increase production by 10% each year over the next five years.
- 2) Education centers achieve an average room utilization of at least 50% annually.
- 3) Meeting rooms achieve an average room utilization of at least 50% annually.

### **Tactics**

- a. Develop and track a building utilization plan for kitchens, meeting rooms, and classrooms that considers staffing, technology, and implementation costs.

## **GOAL 2: ECONOMIC MOBILITY**

Housing affordability and living wage income are inextricably linked. ForKids clients will have opportunities to gain skills of their choice that lead to living wage employment.

**Objective 2.1:** 65% of adults participating in housing and economic mobility programs will increase earned income by program exit.

### **Tactics**

- a. Provide incentives for goals achieved in areas of family stability, well-being, financial management, and employment.
- b. Connect adults to GED programs necessary to meet baseline qualifications for training programs.

**Objective 2.2:** 400 adults will complete a vocational training, certification, or degree program while engaging with ForKids over the next five years.

### **Tactics**

- a. Provide incentives for goals achieved in areas of family stability, well-being, financial management, and employment.
- b. Build and maintain partnerships with targeted vocational programs based on industries most attractive to ForKids participants and those with potential for a living wage career.

**Objective 2.3:** 50% of households will increase their earned income to at least twice the cost of Fair Market Rent within three years of working with ForKids.

### **Tactics**

- a. Fully leverage all available resources to break down barriers to accessing career pathways, including assistance with enrollment costs, uniforms/equipment, childcare, and transportation.
- b. Utilize Mobility Mentoring® practices to guide assessment, coaching, and client incentive protocols to support long-term housing retention.
- c. Increase average length of stay in Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing programs and encourage subsequent participation in Mobility Mentoring® programs.

### **GOAL 3: EDUCATIONAL ADVANCEMENT**

Children experiencing housing instability are more likely to have educational and developmental delays that impact the trajectory of their lives. ForKids will address the academic and social-emotional needs of our students to close academic achievement gaps and provide a foundation for vocational success.

**Objective 3.1:** 90% of students will meet Virginia Department of Education attendance requirements.

#### **Tactics**

- a. Effectively advocate for families' and children's McKinney-Vento rights.
- b. Closely track attendance and utilize intensive RTI (Response to Intervention) process to positively impact school attendance.

**Objective 3.2:** 85% of students will improve their socio-emotional skills as measured by SELweb assessments.

#### **Tactics**

- a. Utilize data from SELweb assessments to inform programming.
- b. Facilitate ongoing training and practice of mindfulness for staff and students.
- c. Implement Children's Mental Health Specialist position to inform and support programming, staff, families, and students.

**Objective 3.3:** 90% of students will improve at least two 21st Century Skills of Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, and Communication.

#### **Tactics**

- a. Utilize project-based learning to improve 21st Century Skills.
- b. Develop a 21st Century skills assessment tool to monitor students' progress.
- c. Create partnerships which provide Saturday enrichment programming including art, music, and other creative outlets to support 21st Century skills.

**Objective 3.4:** 90% of middle and high school students will identify a minimum of two viable career pathways.

#### **Tactics**

- a. Develop career and implement pathways curriculum for middle and high school students.

b. Develop A.I.M. (Achievement Inspired Mentoring) goals and assessments for high school students to include career exploration.

**Objective 3.5:** 75% of students identified as performing one year or more behind grade level in reading or math will reduce their achievement gaps.

### **Tactics**

- a. Identify effective assessment tools that align with public school systems.
- b. Establish data partnerships with all school districts to track long-term data around remediation and high school graduation rates.
- c. Provide one-on-one tutoring three days per week for children performing at one or more years behind their peers.

## **GOAL 4: FAMILY WELL-BEING**

Long-term housing instability and homelessness negatively impact mental and physical health and disconnect families from their communities. Utilizing evidence-based and trauma-informed practices, ForKids will positively impact clients' health and social-emotional well-being.

**Objective 4.1:** 75% of participants identifying an unmet medical or behavioral health need will access appropriate treatment.

### **Tactics**

- a. Develop and implement Trauma-Informed Care and Healing Centered Engagement training for staff, volunteers, interns, and partners.
- b. Provide access to clinical services for all ForKids participants through the ForKids clinical services coordinator.
- c. Offer on-site services through healthcare, mental health, and other community partners at the Landmark and Birdsong Centers.

**Objective 4.2:** 85% of adults participating in the nutrition pathway will self-report an improvement in their health-related quality of life.

### **Tactics**

- a. Develop a family nutrition plan to include healthy eating during programming, classes, and coaching for households after residential exit.
- b. Engage 25% of shelter clients in a pathway towards healthy eating, including cooking classes and coaching to achieve nutritional goals after leaving shelter.
- c. Optimize the use of the kitchens at the Landmark and Birdsong Centers to prepare healthy meals and provide cooking classes.
- d. Assist clients in accessing other available healthcare supports to promote healthy lifestyles and improved disease management.
- e. Incorporate nutrition into the Beyond the Bell program through the provision of healthy meals to program participants and nutritional education to accompany meal service.

**Objective 4.3:** 90% of adults will increase the number of informal supports they utilize.

### **Tactics**

- a. Facilitate group interventions for both adults and children that include current and former participants, and community members where applicable.

**Objective 4.4:** 90% of families will increase the number of community supports they utilize.

**Tactics**

- a. Implement meaningful, strategic opportunities for former participants and other “Experts by Experience” to offer peer support, inform programmatic decisions, and build community.
- b. Create targeted partnerships with organizations and groups that amplify diversity, equity and inclusion and follow trauma-informed care strategies to fulfill critical unmet needs.

**Objective 4.5:** 90% of heads of household will improve their self-reliance as measured by a 5-point increase in their Bridge to Self-Sufficiency score.

**Tactics**

- a. Provide ongoing Mobility Mentoring® training to service staff.
- b. Utilize the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency for assessment and goal setting to build family stability, well-being, financial management and employment.

**Objective 4.6:** On average, participants will achieve at least 75% of the goals they set with ForKids staff.

**Tactics**

- a. Provide financial incentives and motivational recognition to reward goal completion.

## **GOAL 5: HOUSING STABILITY**

Safe, decent housing is essential for families to thrive. ForKids families will attain and retain safe, stable, affordable housing.

**Objective 5.1:** 85% of households will secure a permanent housing placement.

### **Tactics**

- a. Expand and enhance landlord recruitment and retention efforts to help families compete for available units.
- b. Utilize a landlord contingency fund to mitigate landlord risk and address damages that may impede maintenance of landlord relationships.

**Objective 5.2:** 75% of households will secure housing within 60 days of entering a housing program.

### **Tactics**

- a. Implement a plan to fully leverage all available funds to lengthen service/rental subsidy periods to support economic mobility goals.

**Objective 5.3:** 75% of households will retain housing for at least 6 months after exit.

### **Tactics**

- a. Implement a resource connection strategy to provide resources as needed.
- b. Track participant progress and housing retention.

**Objective 5.4:** 75% of households will secure housing at an out-of-pocket cost of less than 50% of their monthly income.

### **Tactics**

- a. Establish and maintain partnerships with public or private entities offering subsidized units or vouchers.
- b. Promote the retention and expansion of affordable housing through advocacy and community education efforts (Objective 1.1).

## **GOAL 6: OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE**

Solving our community's most challenging problems requires great staff and a robust operational infrastructure. ForKids will cultivate a diverse, high-performance workforce, rigorously assess operations, and optimally deploy resources to achieve our mission.

**Objective 6.1:** Recruit, train, and retain a diverse, skilled workforce.

### **Targets**

- 1) Maintain less than 20% annual turnover of full-time staff.
- 2) Obtain continuing education of at least 10 hours annually for part-time staff and 20 hours annually for full-time staff.
- 3) Diversity of managers to reflect the diversity of frontline staff.
- 4) Diversity of the Board of Directors to reflect the community at large.

### **Tactics**

- a. Train hiring managers and staff to identify and correct biases in hiring.
- b. Expand recruiting channels to include top universities, effective platforms for hiring in relevant fields, and underrepresented groups.
- c. Establish and monitor continuing education goals.
- d. Conduct annual performance evaluations that identify measurable goals and opportunities for growth and training.
- e. Develop and implement staff mentoring program.
- f. Annually assess staff and Board demographics and develop strategies to cultivate a diverse team.

**Objective 6.2:** Develop sustainable income streams.

### **Targets**

- 1) Fund 10% of annual budget through earned income.
- 2) Retain 95% of renewable grants.
- 3) Receive awards from 66% of new grant applications.
- 4) Retain 75% of major donors at or above their previous funding level.
- 5) Achieve 10% annual growth in the active donor base.

6) Receive planned giving commitments from 5% of long-term donors (10+ years) within five years.

### Tactics

- a. Continue to pursue Low Income Housing Tax Credit partnerships that increase long-term passive income.
- b. Evaluate opportunities to use the Landmark and Birdsong Centers for income producing event rentals.
- c. Grow “Field Day” into a \$250,000 event within 5 years.
- d. Grow the ForKids Foundation through campaign contributions, a planned giving campaign, and investment returns.
- e. Build staff capacity around mid-level donor cultivation and planned giving.

**Objective 6.3:** Maintain trauma-informed facilities and technological infrastructure to support operational and programmatic goals.

### Tactics

- a. Maintain, operate, and assess infrastructure to ensure it is safe and reliable, and meets the needs of organizational programs, participants, and staff.
- b. Report quarterly ticket summaries and closure times from facilities software to senior management and annually to the Board Facilities Committee.
- c. Obtain and monitor user feedback regarding technology used in accounting, human resources, case management, development, and general operating systems and report to senior management.
- d. Implement a preventative and corrective maintenance program that will support day-to-day activities and operational growth.

**Objective 6.4:** Align program and operational needs with financial resources to ensure 95% utilization of all grant awards.

### Tactics

- a. Develop an organizational and program budgeting approach that identifies revenue streams, gaps, and grant spend downs.
- b. Produce and distribute to program managers monthly system-generated reports to track grant and program spending and progress on annual budget.
- c. Assess, monitor, and communicate utilization of grant spending to senior management on a quarterly basis to assist with budget management and decision-making processes.

**Objective 6.5:** Produce accurate and timely internal and external reports and grant billing.

**Targets**

- 1) Submit 100% of grant reports on time per fund requirements.
- 2) Bill 95% of grants within 30 days of the closing of the required grant billing cycle.

**Tactics**

- a. Develop and maintain dashboards for all departments to monitor departmental goals and to inform business decisions.
- b. Eliminate, where possible, dual entry processes across agency systems.

## **APPENDIX A: SWOT SUMMARY**

In December 2020, Michael Anderson Consulting Group facilitated a ForKids staff leadership session to analyze the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) of ForKids. The following chart is what came of the meeting and served as a framework to build the plan upon.

### **Strengths**

- Outside-the-box thinkers and problem-solvers
- Willingness to try new things and innovate across all work
- Adaptable, flexible, quick pivot in crisis
- Fundraising and community relations
- Reputation in community
- Empathy for and relationship with clients
- Staff prioritizes relationships with clients and community partners
- Commitment to data and authentic evaluation

### **Weaknesses**

- Employee turnover
- Unwillingness to say 'No'
- Quick expansion without time to plan
- Capacity overstretched
- Inflexible funding
- Often stuck in 'now' or 'crisis' mode, inhibits seeing and working toward the big picture of breaking the cycle
- Different teams – especially across program and administrative – can feel out of sync or misaligned

### **Opportunities**

- Research and advocacy center - advance strategic policies, share research and data, focus on systems change and long-term prevention services
- Build community and capacity across partners, especially using new facility (could address our challenge of saying 'yes' too often)
- New facility will help with staff cohesion
- Strategic and process-driven focus (rather than crisis responsive)
- Pandemic has brought new community awareness to issues we care about – e.g., education divide,

homelessness, unemployment, food insecurity, etc.

- Geographic expansion
- Program/service expansion – e.g., nutrition and food services

### **Threats**

- Significant organizational change – new building, COVID, finishing capital campaign
- Competitive funding impedes partner collaboration
- Funding restrictions
- Governmental policy, including potential changes that could have negative effects on our clients
- Spreading ourselves too thin, lack of focus
- Donor burnout
- Staff burnout

## APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY INTERVIEW FINDINGS

As part of ForKids' strategy development process, Michael Anderson Consulting conducted a set of 14 confidential interviews between January and February 2021. The interviewees were selected and invited by ForKids leadership, with input and guidance from Michael Anderson Consulting. These 14 individuals represent a diverse set of ForKids constituents, including institutional funders, nonprofit partners, local government officials, and current and former clients. The below interview summary includes themes identified by Michael Anderson Consulting, with representative quotes in italicized fonts. Interviewees and the interview guide are listed at the end of this appendix.

### Competitive Advantages in Hampton Roads

#### Quality and Comprehensiveness of Services

There was unanimous consensus among interviewees that ForKids does excellent work. The organization's scale, ability to work regionally, and singular focus on families experiencing homelessness positions it as the leading child and family homelessness services organization in Hampton Roads. Although articulated in differing ways by interviewees, ForKids 'special sauce' – its mix of crisis response, housing, educational, and other wrap-around services for children and parents, combined with the 'whatever it takes' attitude of staff – has engendered respect and trust among its partners, funders, and clients.

They do a phenomenal job in understanding the needs of homeless families holistically. Their services are provided in a way that's supportive, not accusatory. [ForKids] gives them hope. I've witnessed some of those folks go through the program and regain their strength and belief in themselves.

Although they adjust and respond to opportunities, they're faithful to their mission. They haven't chased money or opportunities that were the darling of the moment. They have a steadfast commitment to low-income families and recognize that housing instability has implications for academic achievement and other long-term outcomes.

A strength of their culture – strong commitment philosophically, personally, and professionally from all ForKids staff to do whatever it takes to help this family.

They are better than any other agency I can think of. I love them so much. They make sure their words are true. They go out of their way to do everything they can to help you.

#### Strength of Staff and Board Leadership

The majority of interviewees cited ForKids' senior staff's leadership, particularly that of CEO Thaler McCormick, as a key differentiating strength. In particular, Thaler's ability to recruit a Board composed of highly influential and well-connected individuals has not only helped strengthen the brand reputation of ForKids locally but contributed to the organization's fundraising success. Every funder and partner interviewed cited Thaler and the Board's ability to fundraise as ForKids' competitive advantage. Some interviewees noted

that the staff and Board leadership have been pivotal in ForKids adopting a truly regional perspective on addressing family homelessness.

At the top of the list of the list is Thaler's leadership. Her ability to assemble a Board and fashion their sense of what their responsibilities were regarding fundraising and branding. They're trusted – their brand is trusted, and their expertise is recognized.

It's amazing what they've been able to do regarding building infrastructure. They're very adept in managing grants and contracts, as well as cultivating donors.

I can't overestimate the role Thaler has played; she really is in my judgement the force behind all of this. The ability of agency leadership and the Board to see their role from a regional perspective. I can't overstate how much this has helped the region. If there is a need and its substantiated and they believe they can provide assistance, they'll step into that space, even if it's a challenge for ForKids.

## **The Impact of COVID-19 on Hampton Roads and Low-Income Families**

### **ForKids' COVID Response is Generally Well-Regarded**

While the majority of interviewees were unaware of the specifics of ForKids' COVID response, there was general agreement that ForKids had the organizational infrastructure and expertise to meet the pandemic and subsequent economic recession and has been effective in addressing the magnitude of the crisis in Hampton Roads.

ForKids' tenacity and capability made them able to regionalize assessment of need and distribution of funds.

On a scale of 1-10, ForKids' COVID response is an 11. They already had the infrastructure there. We had [COVID related funding], and immediately it was like – how do we partner with ForKids? Because they had infrastructure and expertise, they were able to move quickly and get resources out that were needed in the community.

A year ago, before we knew how big COVID would be, Thaler was already working her funders, anticipating that there would be need. She was on the front end, I heard from her before everyone else.

### **The Real Work Will Start Once the Recovery Begins**

While interviewees recognized the challenges posed by the pandemic, most were more concerned about the post-pandemic recovery. At present, there is significant pandemic relief funding for housing and homeless programs, eviction moratoriums, extended unemployment benefits, food aid, etc. These federal and state programs have, to an extent, blunted the impact of the health and economic crises on low-income families. However, interviewees anticipate that the recovery will be much slower and more challenging for low-income families, and that need for housing and social services will increase exponentially once the pandemic and associated relief efforts abate. In particular, remote learning has put children from low-income families at a particular disadvantage: without access to the internet, computers, or an adult at home to help with schoolwork, these children are far more likely to have fallen further behind than their middle-income peers. The need to help children catch up will require tremendous efforts from educational and human service providers.

As difficult as the pandemic has been, it's [helped us address] homelessness. When [COVID relief funding] runs out, we will have a tsunami of people who don't have the resources to bounce back. It won't just be the loss of a home or a job, they may run out of unemployment insurance and there won't be rent relief. Our job is to prepare for the post-COVID future – we'll see tremendous distress and economic deprivation.

As a whole in Hampton Roads, we need to look at our long-term capacity for supportive services. A lot of funding will slow down. Our clients will be impacted long after the immediate crisis is over. They were struggling before COVID; [after COVID] our systems will be inundated when eviction moratoriums are lifted.

We're going to have a lot of students who are going to need a lot of additional support outside of regular school hours to make up for time lost. They'll need help both in terms of academics, but also trauma – trauma has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

## STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

### A Focus on Homelessness Prevention through Housing Policy Advocacy and Long-term Prevention Services

There was a diversity of perspectives on the most impactful opportunities ForKids should consider pursuing. However, the most frequently cited challenge in Hampton Roads was the insufficient supply of affordable housing, coupled with a lack of resources for homelessness prevention services. Multiple interviewees cited the challenges of the predominant 'Housing First' model: many families placed into housing (by ForKids as well as other agencies) are unable to maintain that housing without long-term supportive services, income supports, housing subsidies, etc. As a well-respected and data driven organization, interviewees indicated that ForKids had a powerful platform from which to advocate for affordable housing policies at the local, and potentially state, level. However, there was consensus that more affordable housing is not a 'silver bullet:' without a more intensive focus on long-term prevention and supportive services, low-income families will continue to experience housing instability.

*They should focus on comprehensive [long-term] case management. ForKids could keep families in housing. They've done it before, but it's not their focus now. Prevention is not a sexy thing to sell; it's hard to fundraise for.*

*One thing I see as a weakness, not just at ForKids, is the model of housing first. We've seen many times that an agency will help a family with housing, but then three months later they're back at our door facing homelessness. I don't want to say it's a set up for failure, but families end up right back where they started. They're putting people in units they can't afford or maintain.*

*With their data [on family homelessness], if they're able to continue to tell the story that needs to be told, they could influence policy at the local level. Maybe a five-year plan is advocacy for policy change at the state level.*

*I'm not suggesting public policy in lieu of what they do – what they do is truly foundational. But if they are onto a model here, a natural extension is if you really want to affect systemic change, you have to get to public policy.*

*They may need to think about how they might restructure to do that [policy] work. Right now, ForKids is viewed as a service organization; an impactful and successful one that brings huge benefit to the region. To step into a collective impact, advocacy, or policy role would require ForKids to organize itself differently.*

### Investing in Partnerships and Regional Collaboration

Another frequently cited challenge regarding homelessness in Hampton Roads is the fractured regional service landscape. The jurisdictions in Hampton Roads mostly operate in siloes and have, for the most part, failed to adopt a regional approach to addressing critical social issues. Furthermore, most local nonprofit service agencies serve a limited geography, making ForKids one of the few truly regional players in the child and family/housing services landscape. As such, there is a tremendous opportunity to build more comprehensive partnerships and thus increase service provision for low-income families. However, there was also acknowledgement that ForKids is perceived as a threat by many peer organizations. For example, one interviewee mentioned that due to ForKids' tremendous growth over the last several years, peer organizations are hesitant to invite ForKids into an arena

(e.g., a specific geography or type of service provision) or collaborate with ForKids, for fear that ForKids will 'take over' that space, rendering the peer organization redundant or obsolete. As such, ForKids will have to consider this opportunity extremely carefully and do so in a way that lifts other organizations up as well.

*An issue for ForKids is that there is a certain level of reluctance and resistance to working with ForKids. They're seen as the 900-pound gorilla in certain settings. If ForKids wants to work in partnership, they need to find a way of not 'driving the car' all the time. They've got to figure out a way to come to the table in a way that is well received. Sometimes, something as simple as a change in executive leadership [at a partner organization] could be a great opportunity to scrub the decks.*

*ForKids should invest in more partnerships and collaboration, and create better, streamlined processes over the long-term.*

*We have a business community here – ForKids should develop partnerships with them, not just for funding, but also for employment [opportunities for clients], providing a living wage, in-kind donations, etc.*

*We need to focus on [building a] system, not just a single organization. Families are best served through a system of care, not just one organization. We need a comprehensive and well-integrated system of providers. The Continuums of Care are not necessarily the best. They're focused on the literally homeless. They don't focus on housing instability.*

### **Expanding ForKids' Definition of 'Children' and 'Families'**

While less frequently mentioned, a significant number of interviewees mentioned the need for ForKids to expand its focus to include transition-age youth, particularly parenting youth, experiencing homelessness. While there was acknowledgement that ForKids does serve this population to an extent, the organization hasn't built out specific capacities or expertise to serve this challenging population. Furthermore, there was recognition that Hampton Roads is an aging community and that families experiencing housing instability will increasingly be multigenerational. As such, ForKids will need to consider how it can best serve grandparents and elderly relatives in addition to parents and children.

*No one in the region can adequately serve 18-25-year-old parents. ForKids is serving a small portion of that group, but it's a challenge. They're more transient; they don't answer phone calls or voicemails. They have a new phone number every week. Is it up to ForKids to figure it out? Not really. But because they're 'the' place to go for homelessness in the region, there's a responsibility to identify the issue and get people to come together to figure it out. They do a great job with kids. It's a lot to figure out everything the adults need.*

*We all recognize but haven't addressed parenting youth. Disconnected parenting youth, young people ages 16-24, have very unique needs. We don't have good data on parenting youth. There's a real opportunity for ForKids and other partners to look at that sub-population with unique needs.*

*The need we're seeing here is homeless teenagers. They're still children. We have a surprising number of homeless high school students. I don't know how that fits into ForKids' area, but that's our next struggle. We have apartments for single people. We have a veteran's facility. But what do we have for teens? That would be my suggestion for ForKids.*

*COVID has forced more generations to live together. ForKids' success is with families, but this is an aging community. My guess is that ForKids families are going to start looking very different.*

Interviewees:

- Dr. Wanda Barnard-Bailey – Deputy City Manager, City of Chesapeake
- Dr. Debbie DiCroce – President & CEO, Hampton Roads Community Foundation
- Felicia Ford – Executive Director, Agena Foundation
- Sarah Paige Fuller – Director, Norfolk Community Services Board
- Angela Kellam – President & CEO, The Planning Council
- Miles Leon – President, SL Nusbaum Realty Co.
- Dr. Patricia Popp – Virginia State Coordinator, Project HOPE
- Olivia Smithberger – Executive Director, HERshelter
- Dr. Nancy Welch – Director, Chesapeake Health Department
- Pamela Wong – Family Services Supervisor, Norfolk Department of Human Services
- Former Client (adult)
- Former Client (adult)
- Former Client (child at the time-of-service provision, now an adult)
- Current Client (adult)

## **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **Background**

- Can you please start by sharing with me your familiarity and experience with ForKids?

### **Landscape and Trends**

- How has COVID-19 and the subsequent economic recession impacted Southeastern Virginia and ForKids' clientele?
  - o What have we learned about the Hampton Roads community in this moment that should inform ForKids' working moving forward?
  - o How would you assess ForKids' response to the COVID-19 crisis (e.g., eviction prevention via Virginia Rent & Mortgage Relief, etc.)?

- Are there other political, social, demographic, and economic forces that are impacting child and family homelessness in the local community?

### **ForKids' Strengths**

- Where has ForKids' work had the strongest or most meaningful outcomes?
- What are ForKids' comparative strengths (i.e., in what ways is ForKids unique)? Where/when has ForKids been most successful?
- What are ForKids' skills or capacities that have enabled its success? How are these the same or different from others in the community?

### **Opportunities**

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the child and family/housing services landscape in Southeastern Virginia? Are there critical gaps in the continuum of services and advocacy? Are there particular client needs that ForKids is not meeting that it should be meeting?
- What are the greatest opportunities that ForKids could pursue? In the next year? In the next 5 years? What should ForKids be focusing on over the next several years?
- Are you aware of national models or practices (e.g., program delivery, organizational business model, etc.) that show promise for potential learning and adaptation by ForKids?

## APPENDIX C: FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT

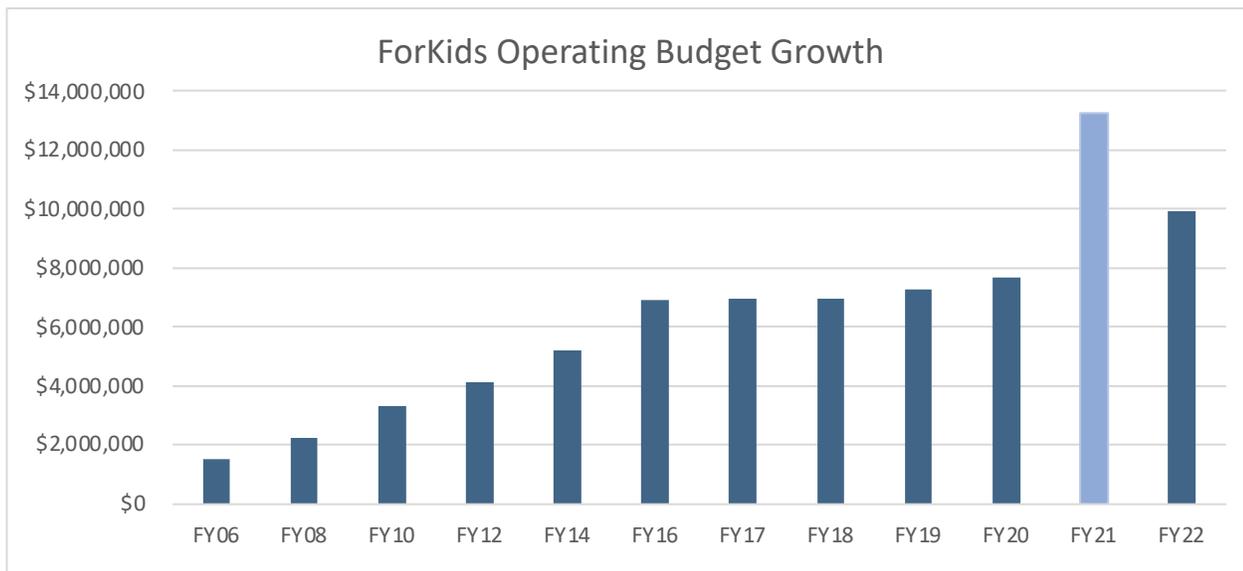
With renewed energy devoted to building Pathways out of Poverty, ForKids will continue to fund and expand evidence-based programs with long-term effectiveness. ForKids has a proven history of successful fundraising and continues to develop diversified funding sources to support, sustain and strengthen the financial resources of the organization. The ForKids Grant Team submits over 125 funding requests annually to a combination of public and private resources. Local city/county, state, and federal government funds account for 52% of ForKids' revenue and are renewable each year. The overwhelming majority of institutional funder are consistent from year to year.

The remaining half of the budget is largely raised through community contributions from private foundations, corporations, and individual donors. The annual ForKids Children's Art Auction, the organization's premier fundraising event, continues to grow each year. In 2021, the Auction raised \$1.4+ million to support the essential programs and services of ForKids.

In November 2021, ForKids celebrated the successful completion of the Campaign ForKids, a 6-year, \$25 million capital campaign to fund the construction of two new facilities and the creation of an operating endowment. By December 31, 2021, more than \$23 million of campaign pledges had been paid in full. The ForKids development team is actively cultivating capital campaign donors to become operating fund investors to fuel the growth described in the 2022 ForKids Strategic Plan: Pathways Out of Poverty.

ForKids has no long-term debt and now holds assets in excess of \$28 million. For 20+ years, the organization has successfully closed each fiscal year with a positive net operating income by effectively managing both revenues and expenses.

*Based on an average annual revenue growth of 18% over 15 years, ForKids projects it will sustain 10% annual revenue growth over the next five years.* With a skilled staff, an active fundraising Board, committed donors, excellent community reputation, and healthy balance sheet, ForKids is well positioned to financially support the ambitious goals outlined in this plan.



Note: FY21 budget includes \$4+Million in COVID-related funding.