

The Opportunity Gap Initiative

Our vision is a community that embraces diversity and inclusivity, where all children have abundant opportunities and feel respected, safe, and secure.

Organizations	Our Work	Outcomes	Changes	Examples
CHUM	Offer therapeutic early childhood and parenting programs for families at Duluth’s Steve O’Neil Apartments who have experienced homelessness, poverty, and abuse.	85% of eligible families attend early childhood programming, gaining access to life-long benefits.	 <p>Individual changes</p> <p>Increased access to resources This includes legal help, food support, healthcare, housing, employment, and financial support.</p> <p>Increased emotional intelligence Developing greater comfort and awareness of their own and others’ emotions.</p>	<p>CHUM provides trauma-informed early childhood programming using evidence-based curriculum with a high level of individualized care for each child to reduce their risks of developmental delays and ensure healthy growth and attainment.</p>
Community Action Duluth	Work with low income families to assist in driver’s license applications, provide donated vehicles, and arrange transportation so children and families can take advantage of after-school and other programs that they otherwise might miss.	At least 44 participants have gained driver’s licenses and 19 participants have been connected with donated vehicles, giving them greater ability to take advantage of community events and employment opportunities.		
Lincoln Park Middle School	Facilitate parent-teacher home visits for families at Duluth Public Schools.	77 students have been given the opportunity to build deeper connections with teachers through teacher home visits, allowing them to feel more supported at school.		
Family Forum, Inc.	Offer coaching and training for parents of children who attend Head Start early childhood education in Superior.	57 caregivers have participated in group parenting classes which teach skills to improve parent-child relationships.	 <p>Relationship changes</p> <p>New relationships between program participants Individuals are connecting with each other to create feelings of community and solidarity.</p> <p>Trusting relationships developed between grantee organizations and families they serve Relationships with grantee staff help community members feel safer and more supported.</p>	<p>Family Forum teaches classes on Conscious Discipline to help parents better understand and communicate with their children, especially during conflict. Parents and caregivers said that they were able to have much healthier relationships with their children because of this intervention.</p>
Heart for the People	Connect community advocates and navigators to families of abused children living in poverty.	80 families have been offered resources to help them stay together.		
Opportunity Youth of Duluth	Provide workshops, trainings, and mentorship to homeless youths age 15 to 21 not in school and not working.	84 youth have been connected with opportunities to secure employment and learn lasting job skills.		
Superior African Heritage Community	Operate programming and meetings focused on cultural heritage for African-American families in Superior.	After school events each give 20 to 30 participants the opportunity to learn more about their heritage and build community with each other.		
Duluth Community School Collaborative	Expand the full-service community school program that provides activities and support for children and families for Myers-Wilkins Elementary School, Lincoln Park Middle School and Denfeld High School.	74% of youth in afterschool programming agree that their participation has helped them learn how to get along better with others.	 <p>Community and Systems changes</p> <p>Increased partnerships between organizations. Grantees are forming partnerships with other organizations to connect families with community resources and services.</p> <p>Greater awareness of systemic barriers. The community’s understanding of the opportunity gap and barriers families face is increasing.</p>	<p>Duluth Community School Collaborative partnered with over 40 community agencies to make broader changes in school systems, including providing healthcare and mentorship to students. As part of these systemic changes, the collaborative has expanded to include elementary, middle, and high schools.</p>
Men as Peacemakers	Bring violence prevention and leadership programs to create equity for teenage girls and pre-teen boys.	91% of participants in Men as Peacemakers’ Boys Restorative Program report an increase in their decision-making skills because of the program.		
Mentor Duluth Mentor Superior	Provide supportive mentors to youth in the Duluth and Superior areas.	221 youth have gained positive relationships with adults, helping them feel more supported.		

More than 2,981 children and youth were served by Opportunity Gap Initiative grantee organizations from 2016-2018.

The Opportunity Gap Initiative made progress toward closing the opportunity gap by increasing opportunities in parenting and caregiving, education, and community.

Grantees increased opportunities for families experiencing poverty

- Youth and early childhood programs set children up for lifelong success
 - Children learn leadership, economic, and emotional regulation skills
 - Youth gain confidence in themselves and are exposed to more opportunities
- Adults are taught living skills and guided to resources to help them provide for themselves and their children
 - Parenting skills help caregivers understand and navigate children's emotions, helping them provide support rather than stress
- Grantee programs are starting to work on broader systems change to close the gap
 - For example, school systems were influenced to provide holistic care for students
- The community has greater awareness of the gap and more desire to support families experiencing poverty

Several factors contributed to the success of the Opportunity Gap Initiative

- Adherence to DSACF's principles
 - Wrap-around services, holistic approaches, and empowering participants were especially meaningful
 - Strong, trusting relationships between grantees and their clients was most impactful
- Grantee activities which respond to and focus on the specific needs of each family
 - Having strategies for participants make decisions about services encouraged buy-in and ensured services were the right fit
- Partnerships between grantees and other community organizations
 - Clients can easily be connected to services they need among partners
- Programming which prioritizes youth and families
 - Teaching skills to both youth and caregivers helps promote safe and stable environments for children

Lessons learned

- The systemic nature of the gap and issues of poverty, racism, and segregation which sustain it are the primary challenges in closing the opportunity gap.
- More impacts could be seen given a longer span of time.
- Grantees felt they could have a greater impact from more intentional collaboration. Future work on the opportunity gap should be focused on intentional collaboration across organizations.

Next steps

- Continued public education on the opportunity gap and its causes
- Renewed focus on youth outcomes and successes
- Implementation of a collective impact approach in which organizations use a common agenda and continuous communication to collaborate

"It's been nice, when you go on parent-teacher home visits, to be able to suggest specific organizations' services if a family has certain struggles. I had one mom who was like, "Oh, I received a card from [that organization]," and then told me the story [of connecting with their services]. That has been cool to see those connections and those resources, hugging that family or surrounding them or supporting them." – Grantee staff