



## The Foresight Initiative An Overview

**The onset of COVID-19 brought volatility upending all aspects of our lives.** In the child and youth services sector, young people were increasingly traumatized by the violence, racism, political unrest, and contention shaking their communities, either brought on or fueled by the pandemic. Longstanding problems related to diversity, pay inequity, and burnout were being called out, and today, social workers and teachers are exhausted and in short supply. Administrators continue to struggle to keep their programs going, revive their workforce, re-allocate resources, and navigate an expanded dependency on technology. The fact that all youth have been traumatized by the pandemic to varying degrees has increased concern among mainstream parents and put more pressure on schools to make changes. Government and private funders that initially responded to the immediate crisis, have since begun to shift their priorities, altering the funding landscape.

**But innovation is born of crisis and in the past two-plus years we have seen this firsthand.** In the early stages, technology rushed in with all manner of solutions, and we are still figuring out what it's good for and what it's not. Clearly the workplace is forever changed with the acceptance of remote work. Virtual training, national meetings, and conferences are better attended, and online education and telehealth, especially in many rural communities, is proving effective. Online mental health care is thus far a mixed bag, especially for under-resourced young people who struggle with access to technology, and often need more hands-on assistance and personal connection.

**In our view, a greater appreciation for the lived-experience and creativity of young people has been the biggest win during this period of loss.** Not only because this generation stands at the threshold, but for all those adults steeped in youth development, the pandemic laid bare our many self-limiting biases about young people's capabilities. Youth are being invited to the table more often and in new and myriad ways. Their feedback and design ideas are helping to center programs around their experience. Professional collaboration is burgeoning across the field, and despite the heaviness of the work, a renewed sense of purpose is a priority for practitioners. Why did it take so long to arrive at this more enlightened place? Again, innovation is often born of crisis.

**It was within this dynamic context that Youth Catalytics launched The Foresight Initiative in 2021.** We wanted to explore the creative pivots and forward-thinking innovations that would lead us into the future. We organized our inquiry into three parts: 1) We surveyed 100 of our colleagues and selectively compiled what other youth development experts were discovering; 2) we facilitated powerful focused conversations with several groups of young people and additional adult professionals; and 3) we interviewed eight diverse leaders across the sector, recorded our conversations, and published them throughout the year.

**From the outset, The Foresight Initiative intended to amplify young voices, showcase experimentation, and encourage forward-thinking practice.** We present a sampling of the thoughtful and inspiring intelligence we've gathered and offer this snapshot as an incentive for the field to rise up and meet new opportunities for innovation as they inevitably continue to emerge. Our biggest takeaways are the experiences and recommendations from those we spoke with. People shared their fears and anxieties alongside their hopes and dreams. To learn more please visit: [The Foresight Initiative](https://youthcatalytics.org) at [youthcatalytics.org](https://youthcatalytics.org).