

Organizational Report (2019-2022)

YOUTH RESEARCH INC

**BUILDING OPPORTUNITY THROUGH
RESEARCH, TRAINING, INNOVATION,
COLLABORATION, LEADERSHIP, AND INCLUSION**



YRI

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A Note on the Contents of This Report

Because this is YRI's first organizational report, the information provided spans the first three years of our work. The following pages include details about YRI's growth from 2019 to 2022 and a preview of the year ahead.

Message from the Executive Director

The theme for Youth Research Inc. (YRI) for our first three years is growth. YRI has expanded from one employee in 2019 to 76 as of March 2023; increased our training workplans from three awards to eleven; and enlarged our annual budget from nearly \$1.8 million in 2019 to approximately \$15.6 million in 2023. We have continued to expand upon the training workplans and have also diversified YRI's body of work to include:

- Conducting focus groups and convenings to gather feedback to improve OCFS-funded programs
- Implementing pilot projects to test new initiatives
- Developing best practices and generating recommendations to scale new initiatives statewide and even nationally

There is more growth on the horizon – in the next 12-to-18 months, we will expand our capacity to take on more special projects designed to foster systemic change necessary to improve equity and access to vital human services programs for New Yorkers.

I am proud of what we have accomplished in the last three years and excited for what is to come as YRI broadens its scope with an unequivocal commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging at the forefront. Please join me in celebrating what we have built. We anticipate a bright future.

We thank our employees, board, partners, and supporters for all you have done to help us grow!

Sincerely,

Cassie Pustilnik

Mission Statement

Our mission is to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of New York State's children, families, and communities.



YRI worked with Illustrating Progress to create this visual representation of our core values. These values emphasize growth that prioritizes employee well-being and a focus on service to communities throughout New York State.

Who We Are

Our organization was established in 2019 to conduct training and research and develop program and policy recommendations that support the work of New York's Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and local agencies that serve youth and families. Our work enables OCFS and its state and local partners to enhance program and service provision. Through innovation, collaboration, training, and research, we build understanding of the intricacies and complexities of working with children, families, and adults. Our work will help position OCFS and its partners as national leaders in the field.

Cassie Pustilnik, Executive Director, reports to the Board of Directors and oversees organizational operations.

Wendy Calabrese, Vice President of Programs, oversees training and program management. The training team provides classroom-based, hybrid, and virtual training and technical assistance contracted by OCFS. Training participants include local social services district, voluntary agency, community-based organization staff, and child day care regulatory staff who provide services in partnership with OCFS. Additionally, Wendy oversees the program management team which provides support for training and other operations at the Human Services Training Center. This team also plans and schedules training and events, including multiple annual in-person and virtual events.

Julie Aversa, Vice President of Finance, oversees finance and human resources. The finance team manages YRI's contracts and grants; manages organizational, program, and project budgets; and supports financial processes that impact YRI's programming. The human resources team manages recruitment, benefit administration, and employee engagement strategies.

Gregory Kwaczala, Vice President of Strategy, Equity, and Advancement, oversees YRI's special projects, development, communications, and research teams. The special projects team implements pilot projects and other activities in response to emerging needs identified by OCFS. The development and communications team raises funds to support YRI and OCFS initiatives and conducts internal and external communications functions. The research team collects and analyzes data related to special projects and generates recommendations and best practices related to OCFS programs.

2019 – 2020

Weathering the COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency

YRI was operational for less than seven months before most of New York was forced to close its physical schools, offices, and other public spaces in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic continued to impact operations, our training staff worked with OCFS to develop a virtual approach to delivering training that offered safety and efficacy.

2021

Building a Brand and Preparing for Growth

In 2021, YRI received a two-year grant from the Robin Hood Foundation. The grant supported a pilot approach to offering Infant-Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) using the Infant-Toddler Climate for Healthy Interaction (IT-CHILD) tool developed by scholars at Yale University and to grow its organizational capacity. Using this funding, we forged relationships with partners in child care, including the OCFS Division of Child Care Services, Yale Zigler Center, Early Care and Learning Council (ECLC), Docs for Tots, Brightside Up, and the Child Care Council of Westchester, Inc.

In 2021, with grant funding and strategic support from the Robin Hood Foundation, YRI also developed and launched new organizational branding, an organizational website, and a bi-monthly staff newsletter — all while moving our administrative staff to a new office better suited to our needs.



2022

Driving Dynamic Organizational Growth and Development

In 2022, YRI was awarded additional contracts that support OCFS. This included greater responsibility for production of curriculum and materials and for the oversight of emerging needs, which includes OCFS priorities that are identified during the contract year.

As the state reopened as the effects of COVID-19 began to wane, our team reimagined ways to offer training that incorporates what they learned from virtual operations while maintaining safe, in-person training opportunities.

Throughout 2022, there was growing recognition that YRI serves as a critical partner to OCFS and others and that led to consistent requests to collaborate on upcoming initiatives. In conjunction with the Division of Child Welfare and Community Services, YRI positioned itself to play an instrumental role in supporting the transformation of the child welfare system into a family and child well-being system.



GROWTH

2022 OCFS Contracted Events

Child Protective Services Response Training (CPSRT) Skills Demonstration (SimFest)

On the cutting edge of workforce development programs, the CPSRT Skills Demonstration, also called SimFest, creates simulated environments for new child welfare practitioners with responsibilities in Child Protective Services to practice the skills they have learned in training. Utilizing the OCFS Human Service Training Center, hired actors simulate real-world situations that allow caseworkers to explore environments from in-home investigations to court room appearances all under the careful observation of YRI trainers. This classroom-to-practice model ensures caseworkers are prepared as they go out into communities across New York. This model of training has been proven to better equip caseworkers with the practical skills they need to put theory into practice, and readies them for on-the-job application.

Annual Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Conference

In September 2022, YRI provided event coordination and support for the 4th Annual Indian Child Welfare Act Conference (ICWA) held in Syracuse, NY. Funds from this project were used to support leaders from the NYS Tribal Nations to attend the conference. The conference provided valuable training and networking opportunities that will allow attendees to better serve their communities. Conference attendees learned about the need for the Indian Child Welfare Act, Native culture, and the role of the Qualified Expert Witness. YRI contracted with Jamie Jacobs to present at the conference to provide philosophies; share how decisions are made that affect future families; and explain how traditions and laws are passed down in Indigenous communities.

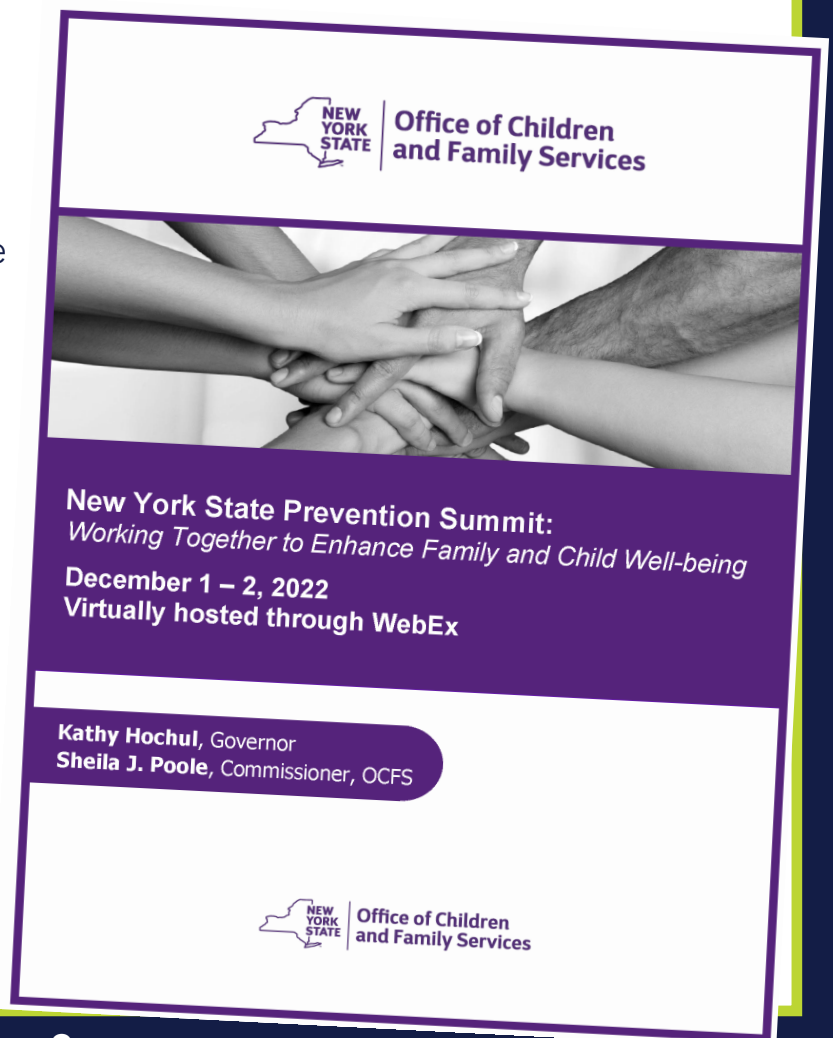


Prevention Summit

YRI provided event coordination and support for the *2022 New York State Prevention Summit: Working Together to Enhance Family and Child Well-being*. The summit was designed to offer a virtual platform to share family-strengthening strategies to support child well-being and prevent child welfare involvement with local departments of social services, voluntary agencies, and community-based service providers.

Clare Anderson of Chapin Hall presented *Prevention Strategies: The Role of Economic and Concrete Supports*, which shared the mounting evidence that macro-economic and public benefit policies designed to support families meet their basic needs, reduce material hardship and can prevent both neglect and abuse. Dr. Marcella Wilson of Transition to Success presented *Understanding and Responding to the Condition of Poverty*, which demonstrated how the program she founded uses a medical model to treat poverty as an environmentally based, treatable condition and not a character flaw.

These presentations at the summit tie directly into the work of the Strategy, Equity, and Advancement Team who recently finalized a contract for the Direct Cash Transfer Research Pilot, a special project that tests the hypothesis that providing economic supports to families will result in fewer interactions with the child welfare system. This project and YRI's process mapping was shared during the Summit, and it generated a lot of excitement from the group.



The graphic is a purple-bordered rectangle containing the following elements:

- Top Left:** New York State logo (a map outline) and the text "NEW YORK STATE".
- Top Right:** "Office of Children and Family Services" logo.
- Center:** A black and white photograph of several hands of different ages and skin tones stacked on top of each other.
- Bottom Left (purple background):** "New York State Prevention Summit: Working Together to Enhance Family and Child Well-being", "December 1 – 2, 2022", and "Virtually hosted through WebEx".
- Bottom Center (purple background):** "Kathy Hochul, Governor" and "Sheila J. Poole, Commissioner, OCFS".
- Bottom Right:** New York State logo and "Office of Children and Family Services" logo.

2022 New Contracted Programs

YRI now offers **Child Day Care Training** that supports the Division of Child Care Services, including:

- Child Care Facility System (CCFS) and Child Care Facility System 2 (CCFS2) training for agencies who enroll and monitor Legally Exempt Child Care Providers. This training provides the foundational knowledge needed to document, enroll, and monitor relative and non-relative legally exempt child care providers and enhances the state's ability to support non-traditional child care options.
- Child Care Time and Attendance (CCTA) system training for local district and contract agency staff who verify eligibility, track time and attendance, and calculate and authorize payments through the New York State Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). This training supports access to affordable child care by improving the accuracy and timeliness of CCAP payments.
- CCFS, CCFS2, and Facility Application and Management System (FAMS) one-day, hands-on simulation course that covers the interconnected systems of record for all child care licensors and regulators in New York State. This course is designed for regulators who monitor Licensed/Registered childcare programs in conjunction with the Licensing Institute policy training offered under General Child Care Training/Educational Incentive Program/Career Enhancement. Regulators who complete this course have the foundational knowledge to accurately assess, record, and maintain all records in accordance with Social Services Law and established regulatory standards for licensing/registering, inspection, complaint, and reporting processes.

YRI launched new **Motivational Interviewing (MI) Training**. MI supports New York's commitment to the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) as one of the evidence-based prevention strategies included in the Title IV-E Clearinghouse. YRI trainers who facilitate MI training are preparing caseworkers across New York to empower individuals and families to make the changes they need to avoid removal, prepare for reunification, and engage their families and community networks to support their ability to provide safe and nurturing homes for their children. Motivational Interviewing is an approach that empowers individuals to identify a need for change and then to work toward a decision to commit to, make, and sustain that change. This approach is strengths-based and recognizes the agency of each individual on their journey to lasting change.

Robin Hood Foundation Contracted Programs Conducted in Partnership with OCFS

YRI received a grant from the Robin Hood Foundation to conduct a Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) research project. YRI convened New York State Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) administrators, child care providers, and families to provide insight into ways OCFS can improve access to CCAP funds. We developed data-informed recommendations to enhance CCAP processes so that families can more easily access funds and more providers accept CCAP-funded children. Many of our recommendations align with those outlined in Governor Hochul's 2023 State of the State address and FY 2024 Budget. (Note: We are excited to see that some of the recommendations YRI made as part of our Child Care Assistance Program Research Project aligned with the State of the State address!)

In addition, YRI continued its **Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) Project**, and began to develop recommendations to inform the next round of funding to support the rollout of IECMHC throughout New York State. Our recommendations are designed to support the use of the IT-CHILD tool to offer mental health consultation services to child care providers in New York.

These services are expected to improve relationships between providers and the children they care for, improve the wellbeing of child care workers, and decrease child care expulsions, particularly for children of color and boys who are more likely to be expelled. Visit bit.ly/3ySzFL8 to learn more about the IT-CHILD Tool.

A project in collaboration with:

Youth Research Inc.  Office of Children and Family Services  Docs & TOTS 

Yale SCHOOL OF MEDICINE Child Study Center  New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute

I-T CHILD

Dimensions of the Tool:

1. Transitions
2. Directions & Rules
3. Social & Emotional Learning
4. Adult Awareness
5. Adult Affect
6. Adult Cooperation
7. Adult-child Interactions
8. Individualized & Developmentally Appropriate Pedagogy
9. Child Behaviors

 
Learn more about the I-T CHILD Tool

Infant-Toddler Climate of Healthy Interactions for Learning & Development (I-T CHILD)

How Consultation Can Help

Mental health consultation is a researched-based form of social-emotional support that focuses on enhancing the interactions between child care providers and the children in their care. Research has shown that consultation services benefit both children and providers. Studies have found gains in children's social-emotional development, and gains in providers' locus of control, and reductions in children's problem behaviors and providers' stress (Gilliam, 2007; Gilliam, Maupin, & Reyes, 2016; Reyes & Gilliam, 2021).

The I-T CHILD model of consultation was developed by Yale's Child Study Center and is being piloted with family and group family child care providers across NYS. This model includes both a framework for consultation services and an assessment tool to assess the overall social-emotional climate of care settings. Consultation services using the I-T CHILD model include a pre-consultation, and a post-test to measure growth throughout the program. The I-T CHILD assessment measures providers on the nine focus areas shown to the left.

The I-T CHILD model is unique in that it provides a data-driven approach to consultation services that includes strategies that are culturally-competent and developmentally appropriate for the children in care. This model of services is also child-centered and encourages adults to view behaviors through the child's lens.

References

Gilliam, W. S. (2007). Early Childhood Consultation Partnership: Results of a random-controlled evaluation. Final report and executive summary. Unpublished manuscript. http://www.chsc.org/files/3814/1202/7645/evaluation_of_etc_early_childhood_consultation_partnership.pdf

Gilliam, W. S. (2014). Early Childhood Consultation Partnership: Results Across Three Statewide Random-Controlled Evaluations. Executive Summary. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 53(9), 754-761. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2014.06.006>

Reyes, C. R., & Gilliam, W. S. (2021). Addressing challenging behaviors in challenging environments: Findings from Ohio's early childhood mental health consultation system. *Development and Psychopathology*, 33(2), 624-646.

2022 Organizational Growth and Development Achievements

In 2022, YRI realized growth internally, tackling new initiatives and projects that helped it become a

Capital Region Top Workplace!

YRI convened a **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)** committee that has developed a plan to infuse DEIB priorities and strategies into our work, systems, and processes across the organization. As an organization and as individuals, we have an opportunity to uplift diverse voices and promote equity and inclusion in all that we do.

To support our growth and development in DEIB, we educate ourselves on the historical and contemporary ways various groups have been subjected to discrimination, inequality, and other forms of injustice. We acknowledge and recognize the past and present contributions and achievements of people from underrepresented backgrounds through months dedicated to recognizing these groups. We developed the following version of our organizational logo to include in our email signatures. The image below represents the values we infuse into our work through our DEIB initiatives.



We also updated our **Equal Opportunity Employer statement** to clearly state our commitment to antiracism, equity, and inclusion and **expanded our bereavement policy, parental leave policy, and holiday policy** to ensure that our employees have the flexibility to meet their varying individual and family needs.



YRI **Established a Strategy, Equity, and Advancement Team (SEA)** to develop and implement special projects to support OCFS needs, support communication and development needs related to YRI-operated projects, and develop and implement federal and private grant applications to support those projects.

We **launched a new fundraising program through RaiseRight**. This program allows employees and supporters to raise money for YRI while they shop. Funds raised through RaiseRight will be used to support the professional development needs of YRI employees. At the same time, we have developed a new Emerging Needs Fund, which will support needs identified by OCFS and community stakeholders. This fund will support rapid response to implement new projects, conduct research, and generate policy recommendations. YRI will seek foundation and corporate funding to build the Emerging Needs Fund.



New Opportunities on the Horizon

Identifying Priorities

Based on Governor Hochul's State of the State address, executive budget, and discussions with OCFS and other partners, we anticipate the following **statewide priorities for 2023**:

- Reducing child poverty by addressing historic racial inequities, which impact Black, Hispanic/Latino, and multi-racial families at higher rates than other children in New York State
- Upstreaming preventive services to support families before they reach a point where they interact with the Child Welfare System
- Making progress toward achieving universal access to high-quality early childhood education opportunities by improving access to child care assistance funds, ensuring that child care workers earn family-sustaining wages, expanding the number of child care slots available in all communities, and increasing full-day universal pre-k availability

Now, as we are recovering from the pandemic-era operational changes, we are venturing into exciting new areas of growth.

To be ready to support OCFS as these priorities are addressed, YRI's new **SEA Team** is meeting with OCFS division leaders to determine how we can best support them. The SEA team and YRI's senior management team are working together to compile data and search for funds to cover ongoing and potential initiatives.

To support the large multi-system goals stated above, YRI seeks to engage in:


- Improving connections between child welfare and child care to enhance families' ability to work or attend school while meeting the needs of their children
- Providing technical assistance and other support to help grassroots and community-based organizations better access funding they need to help New York families in their own communities
- Supporting expanded implementation of upstream strategies and practices to helping families, such as Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT) and Motivational interviewing (MI)

Building Capacity

In addition to building its capacity to support statewide priorities, emerging needs, and special projects, YRI is **building its board** with equity in mind. We are seeking board members with professional and lived experience that will complement the strengths and skills of our staff and leadership team.

Join Us!

Youth Research Inc Board of Directors



Mission

Our mission is to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of New York State's children, families, and communities.

Core Values

- Being a team player
- Reliability
- Vulnerability
- Care and respect
- Anticipatory and proactive

Contact

(518) 808-4055
contact@yriny.org
www.yriny.org
25 Delaware Avenue
Delmar, NY 12054

Board Member Responsibilities

Regularly attend board meetings (typically four-to-six held per year)

Serve on one-to-two committees (meet quarterly or as-needed)

Support strategic and organizational planning

Provide fiduciary and programming oversight

Hold YRI Leadership Team accountable

Review and approve fundraising plans

Promote fundraising opportunities among your network

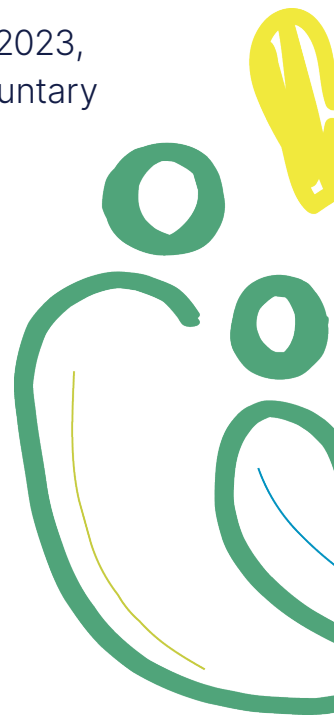
Make direct fundraising requests within your personal and business networks



Continuing Our Commitment To OCFS Training

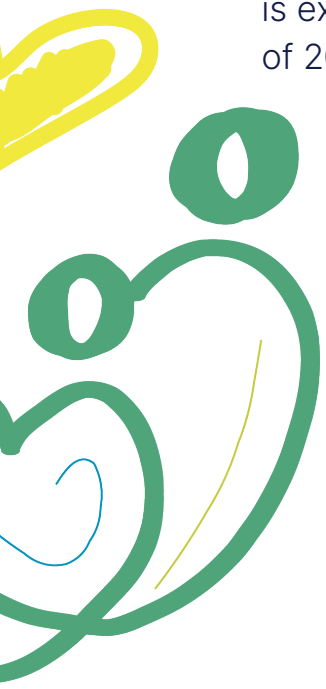
In 2023, YRI's **Program Management Team** is supporting:

- Ongoing weather monitoring to proactively plan for any impact to training at the Human Services Training Center
- Travel and lodging arrangements for trainees visiting the Human Services Training Center
- 2023 CPS In-Service Planning and Needs Assessment implementation. Training needs include Crucial Conversations and Critical Thinking, Addressing Challenging Client Behavior, and Identifying and Engaging Family Resources
- Motivational Interviewing training registration and support, including coordinating lodging, managing training evaluations, and assigning credit/closing classes.
- Recruitment, onboarding, and management of actors for training simulations.
- 2023 Local District Social Services Safety Training Needs Assessment
- Ongoing support to the Trauma Informed Care Trainings provided by Coordinated Care Services both in-person and virtually.
- Planning and implementation for virtual and in-person events in 2023, including the 2023 Directors of Services Event and the 2023 Voluntary Agency Summit



In 2023, **YRI's Training Teams** are up for the challenge of learning new material and delivering new trainings. Two pilot programs are set to begin in early 2023.

- The new two-day Child Welfare Foundations Program (CWFP) Skills Demonstration will be available for child welfare staff who attended the Foundations training on the virtual platform but did not go on to Child Protective Services Response Training (CPSRT). This new training delivery allows child welfare staff to come to the Human Services Training Center (HSTC) for hands-on skills practice that mirrors situations they will likely encounter when working with children and families in the field. All YRI staff working on the CWFP project will learn this new material and facilitate the training on teams consisting of four trainers and two support supervisors. This training is being piloted at the end of April.
- New York State is moving away from using the Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP) and toward the National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC) for Foster and Adoptive Parents, a trauma-informed curriculum. YRI staff are working collaboratively with OCFS to develop and learn the NTDC train-the-trainer for foster and adoptive parent homefinders. Meetings to discuss planning for this training began in January and will continue with walkthroughs of the material through April. The pilot delivery has not yet been scheduled but is expected to be provided by YRI staff within the second quarter of 2023.

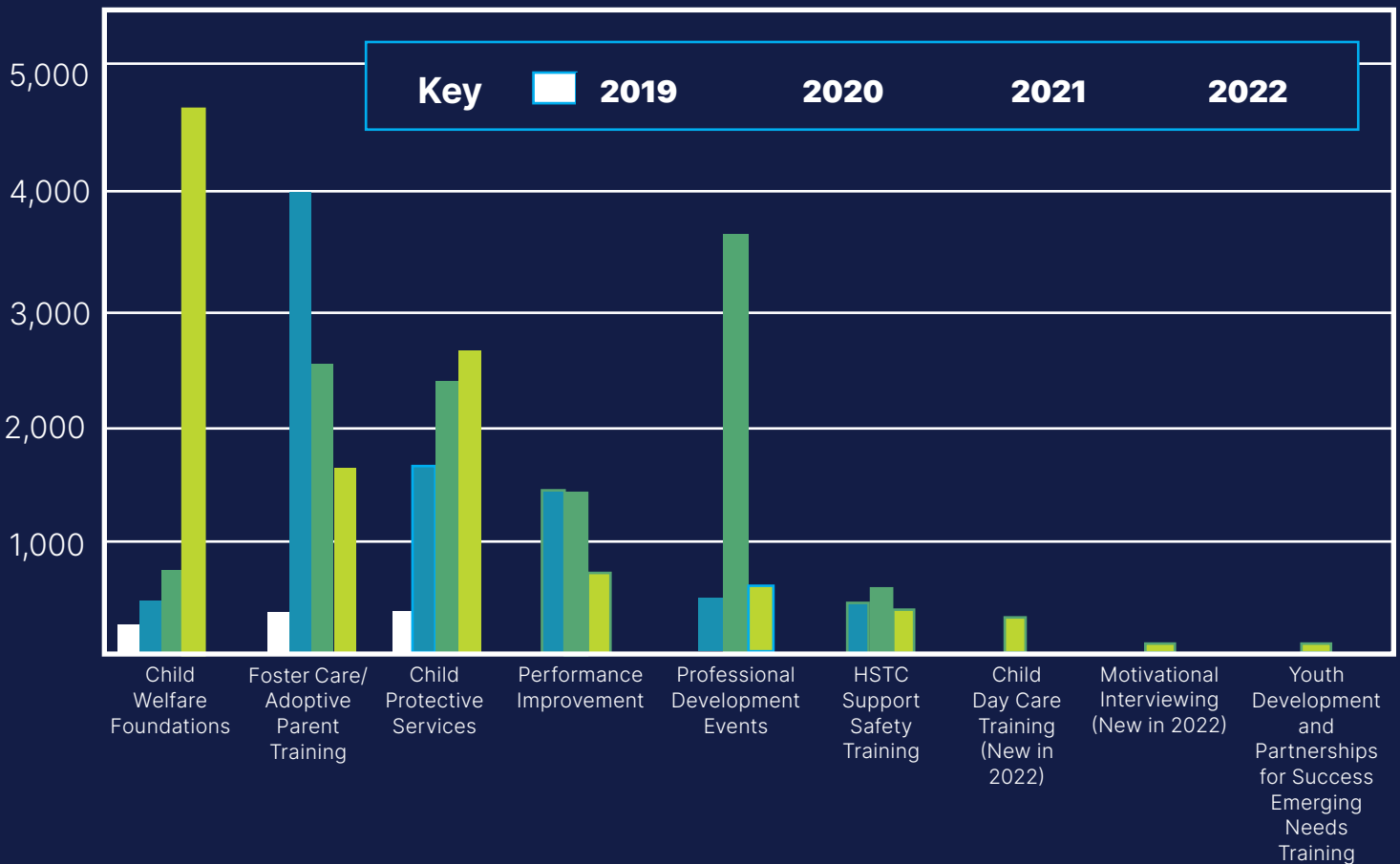


YRI By the Numbers

Number of Employees



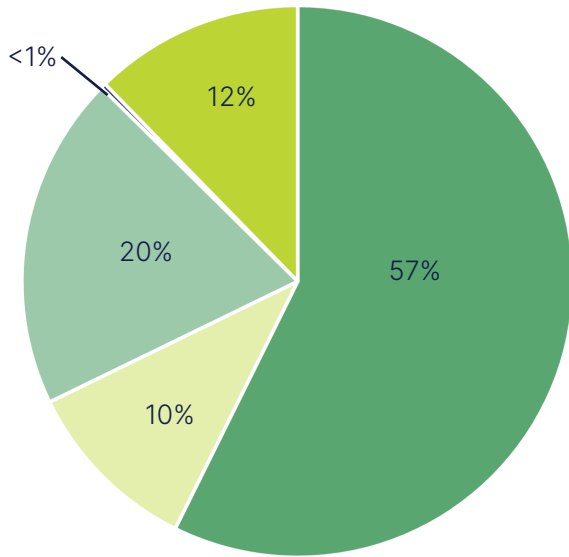
Training and Event Attendance by Year



Financial Growth

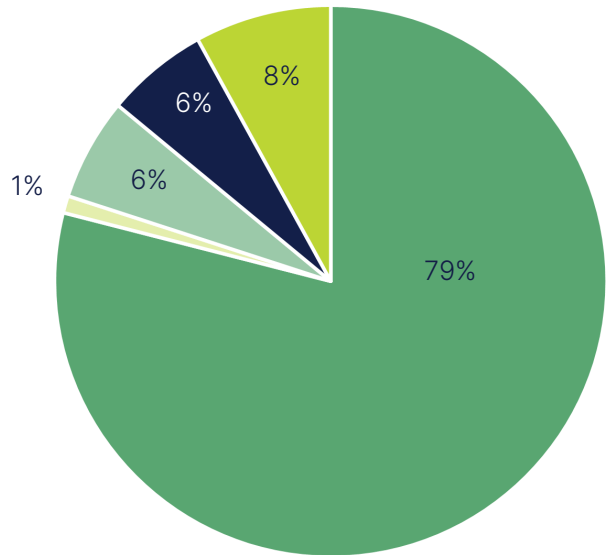
2019 Expenses

\$870,321



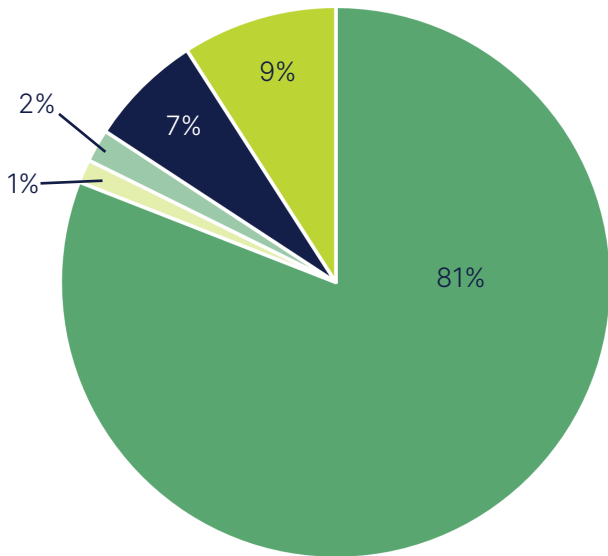
2020 Expenses

\$4,738,073



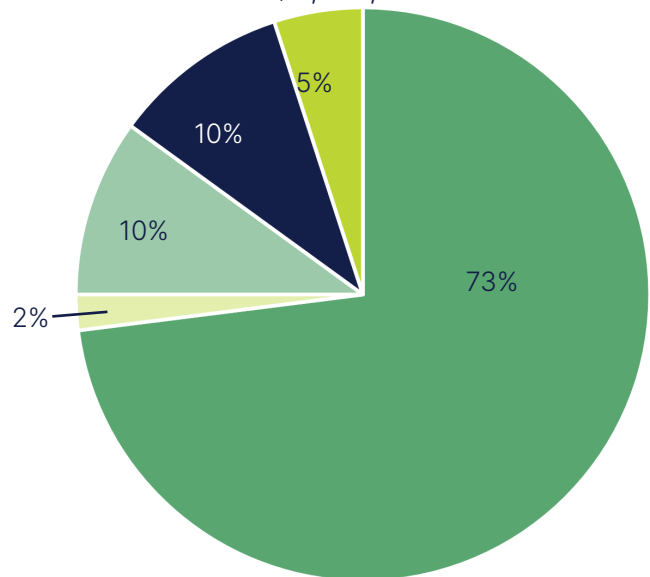
2021 Expenses

\$6,428,166



2022 Expenses

\$6,371,834*



*unaudited figures

Key

Staff

Other and Indirect

Staff and Trainee Travel

Consultants and Subcontractors

Equipment and Supplies



YRI

www.yriny.org