



**FROM PROGRAM TO CULTURE:**  
Promoting Positive Family  
Interactions Demonstration Grant



 [www.poisefoundation.org](http://www.poisefoundation.org)

**YEAR 2**  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

# POISE FOUNDATION'S STRENGTHENING BLACK FAMILIES GRANTMAKING STRATEGY



aims to re-assert Black families as a core institution in the redevelopment of Pittsburgh's Black community. This is done through community engagement (creating opportunities for community learning and dialogue around the Black family and Black family life); research and policy (promoting policies that positively impact the lives of Black families); thought

leadership (influencing the policymakers, civic leaders, and practitioners regarding the value and efficacy of Black families); and local and national philanthropic partnerships (investing in programming that promotes positive family interactions).

## THE PROMOTING POSITIVE FAMILY INTERACTIONS DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

was developed in response to families' expressed interest in increasing the quantity and quality of time that family members spend together in their homes and communities. It supports programs that work to improve family interactions

and communication; increase family-time activities (e.g. family dinners, family nights, and family outings); encourage family civic engagement; and strengthen family resilience.



# BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

In July 2014, as a part of its broader Strengthening Black Families grantmaking strategy, the POISE Foundation funded four nonprofit organizations through its Promoting Positive Family Interactions (PPFI) Demonstration Grant.

In the first year of funding, PPFI grantees worked with 50 families, which included 65 adults and 99 children. They implemented projects that offered an array of family-centered activities, including multi-

family psychoeducational groups, multi-family outings, family retreats, and individual sessions with families. Much of this work—across organizations—focused on increasing the number of interactions between family members that were intentional and healthy (e.g. compassionate, affectionate, playful, assertive, authentic, supportive, etc.). Families were also given tools for increasing the amount and quality of time they spent together, both at home and in their communities.

**Through PPFI-supported activities, families and family members were given opportunities to:**

- set family goals
- develop new problem-solving, coping, and relationship skills
- learn and play together
- create a sense of shared identity through mission statements and other collaborative projects
- support each other—and other families



**This report covers the second year of funding for the four PPFi grantee organizations. Its findings are based on the perspectives of:**

- 54+ families across all the PPFi programs (via focus groups, one-to-one interviews, and responses to the Family Functioning Style Survey<sup>1</sup>, which some participants completed at the beginning of their participation and at the end of year two)
- three or more staff members from each of the four grantee organizations
- two Foundation staff members
- the professional evaluator hired by POISE



## PPFI PROGRAMS AND PARTICIPANTS

While the organizations and the overall scope of their work remained the same in year two, there were marked changes in their program designs. Some of these emerged as a result of insights and lessons learned during year one, while others emerged naturally—and often of necessity. Most of these shifts were the result of one or more of these factors: 1) the experiences of participants; 2) organizational reflection; 3) increases in organizational capacity; and 4) shifts in organizational culture.

<sup>1</sup>. The Family Functioning Style Scale measures the unique strengths and abilities of families. It looks at 1) interactional patterns; 2) family values; 3) coping strategies; 4) family commitment; 5) resource mobilization; and 6) overall functioning based on the five subscales. Source: *Enabling and Empowering Families*.

## YEAR TWO AT A GLANCE

<b>PPFI</b>	<b>Projects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening Black Families (Amachi Pittsburgh)</li> <li>• Family Matters (Center that C.A.R.E.S.)</li> <li>• Family Matters (Melting Pot Ministries)</li> <li>• Teen Mom, Young Dads Program (University of Pittsburgh Department of Family Medicine)</li> </ul>
	<b>Participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 73 families</li> <li>• 91 adults: 84% females (e.g. mothers, 4 grandmothers); 16% males (fathers and stepfathers)</li> <li>• 130 children</li> </ul>
	<b>Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family art sessions (painting, family collage)</li> <li>• Family art gallery (family collage showcase, family-time event)</li> <li>• Individual family sessions (one organization only)</li> <li>• Multi-family community outings and events (amusement parks, sports activities, festivals, and a holiday party)</li> <li>• Multi-family psychoeducational sessions</li> <li>• Multi-family community conversations (both in-person and live-streamed)</li> <li>• Retreats (a family retreat; youth retreats with parents included)</li> </ul>
	<b>Topics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocacy and leadership</li> <li>• Attachment</li> <li>• Boundaries</li> <li>• Family communication</li> <li>• Family goal setting</li> <li>• Family roles</li> <li>• Family games</li> <li>• Financial literacy</li> <li>• Healthy family functioning</li> <li>• Healthy relationships</li> <li>• Navigating tragedy and triumph</li> <li>• Promoting and supporting healthy youth behavior</li> <li>• Social issues affecting families (incarceration, racism, poverty, community violence, neighborhood relationships, bullying)</li> <li>• Stress and coping</li> </ul>

## PPFI PROGRAMS AT A GLANCE BY SPONSORING ORGANIZATION

	Number of Families and Individuals Participating in the PPFI Program	Key Project Activities	Program Focus
<b>Amachi Pittsburgh: Strengthening Black Families</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 19 families</li> <li>• 19 adult family members</li> <li>• 35 child family members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly multi-family sessions</li> <li>• Multi-family outings and recreational events</li> <li>• Quarterly Healthy Youth retreat (parents included)</li> <li>• Participation in Strong African American Families (S.A.A.F.) Program <sup>2</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting and supporting healthy youth behavior in families</li> <li>• Healthy family relationships</li> <li>• Social issues impacting the family (e.g., causes of incarceration; racism)</li> <li>• Stress and coping</li> <li>• Financial literacy</li> <li>• Advocacy and leadership</li> </ul>
<b>Center that C.A.R.E.S.: Family Matters</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 families</li> <li>• 15 family members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly multi-family group sessions</li> <li>• Live-streamed multi-family community conversations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family roles</li> <li>• Navigating trauma and triumph</li> <li>• Family goal setting</li> <li>• Family communication</li> <li>• Attachment</li> <li>• Family boundaries</li> <li>• Social issues impacting the family (e.g., neighborhood violence)</li> </ul>
<b>Melting Pot Ministries: Family Matters</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 47 families</li> <li>• 57 adult family members</li> <li>• 95 child family members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 family retreat</li> <li>• 3 family art sessions</li> <li>• 1 family art gallery/ family night</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family identity</li> <li>• Family communication</li> <li>• Family-time games</li> <li>• Healthy relationships</li> </ul>
<b>University of Pittsburgh Department of Family Medicine: Teen Mom, Young Dads Program</b>	<p>The primary focus of this project in year two was on strengthening the organization's ability to recruit young couples into the program. New recruitment methods included the use of social media and bus ads. In addition, the project developed partnerships with community agencies that had existing relationships with the target population, and linked this program with another Department of Family Medicine program that works with a similar population.</p>		

<sup>2</sup>. S.A.A.F. is a seven-week interactive educational program for African American parents and their early adolescent children. The program aims to reduce adolescent substance use, conduct problems, and sexual involvement. On a weekly basis, the parent and child meet separately with a trainer or counselor for skill-building. Each set of individual sessions is followed by a family session.

In year one, 50 families and 164 family members (65 adults and 99 children) participated in PPFI activities. In year two, this number grew to 73 families and 221 family members (91 adults and 130 children). Most family members who participated in year one continued their involvement in year two. Few dropped out, and those few generally did so because of external factors (e.g., a new and conflicting work schedule) rather than dissatisfaction with the program.

## OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS

Despite the shifts in program design, the key themes of family experiences remained constant throughout years one and two for virtually all participants:

- Creating a place where people can be and do family
- Applying what is gained in the program in everyday life
- Establishing a sense of community for families
- Finding value in family-centered practice

## CREATING A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE CAN BE AND DO FAMILY

PPFI events remained valued and sacred places for family members to reconnect with one another. Family members looked forward to the opportunity to share, play, learn, and grow together during PPFI activities. They appreciated the opportunity to come together, spend time together as a family, and have family members' attention be on one another. This was true for both new participants and those who continued in a PPFI program for a second year.

As in year one, family members continued to say that participation in the PPFI programs had an overall positive impact on their family relationships. They cited improved

communication, increased family time, a greater sense of togetherness, improved coping, and improved family functioning. (Seventy-five percent of interviewees reported an improvement in the overall functioning of their families.)

On the down side, some family members in a PPFI program whose approach shifted from an intimate "family room" setting to a larger forum expressed a sense of loss. They yearned for the family intimacy they were able to achieve in the room during year one, which wasn't part of the larger-group setting in year two.

## TRANSLATING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS GAINED IN EVERYDAY LIFE

In interviews and focus groups, participants often made the connection between the knowledge and skills developed in program sessions and positive changes that family members made in their daily lives. Participants also noted ways that program sessions prepared them to handle parenting issues and better cope with challenging behaviors they faced with their children. In addition, family members consistently noted that the PPFi programs helped to improve family communication and increased the amount of time their families spent together outside of program sessions.



## ESTABLISHING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY FOR FAMILIES

The multi-family group continued to be an important aspect of the work. Participants felt a sense of support and value, particularly in their ability to share with and contribute to the lives of others. Many participants mentioned the benefits of the mutual support and learning, especially as they worked through difficult issues or celebrated successes. Project staff, who observed this mutual support in action, noted this as well. This sense of community was particularly important for (and especially notable and noticeable among) families who had generally mistrusted people outside of the family unit. For grantee organizations, the multi-family groups were a natural path forward, and an effective (and cost-effective) way to engage families and support healthy interactions in a community space.

Going forward, it will be important to pay particular attention to the role of these multi-family groups—including how to best design, include, and run them as programs scale up. These approaches are being considered for testing during year three:

- Creating some small-group experiences within each larger group (as additions, not replacements).
- Creating some small group experiences for specific topics that might best be dealt with in more intimate settings (e.g., addiction or teen pregnancy).
- Identifying the primary needs of the participant families, and designing small and/or large-group activities around those specific needs (within the limits of capacity and funding).



## FINDING VALUE IN FAMILY-CENTERED PRACTICE

Overwhelmingly, family members—especially parents—supported grantee organizations’ more family-centered approaches. This not only improved relationships within and among families, but it improved many families’ relationships with the organizations. In general, parents were more willing and eager to be connected and involved—with their own families, with other families, and with the sponsoring organizations.

Not all feedback was positive, however. Some participants had concerns about scheduling difficulties (e.g., planning events sufficiently in advance and dealing with conflicting work schedules); clear communication regarding program activities (in particular, giving parents enough advance notice of future events); or the need for the projects to continually evolve along with their participants.

## OUTCOMES FOR GRANTEE ORGANIZATIONS

In year two, each organization sought ways to institutionalize family-centered practice. Instead of thinking only in terms of operating programs, as they did during year one, they focused on the larger context of how they worked with families. Staff at all four PPFi programs revealed that they needed to take deliberate steps—and overcome a variety of challenges—to instill this family-centered focus in their organizational cultures.

They also realized that, to do the work right, they needed to build greater organizational capacity. Two organizations hired staff specifically to work with families and coordinate family programming. A third organization allocated additional staff time.

As grantees continue to do this work, it will be important to understand how these cultural shifts took place in each organization; what steps each one took to encourage and support it; and what capacity issues emerged along the way. This will help the Foundation better determine what types of consultation, technical assistance, and funding (e.g. programmatic, general operating, or unrestricted) can best support each program in order to move POISE toward its overall goals. It will also be helpful to determine what types and amounts of support from a subject matter expert, consultant, and/or evaluator are needed during each phase.

The ability of all grantees and POISE to share learnings and insights with one another in real time has been crucial. It has allowed both the Foundation and grantees to make ongoing changes and refinements based on lessons learned—and to share those lessons in influential ways. However, as grantees’ staffs struggled to figure out how to do this family-centered work, they and POISE also had to figure out an appropriate role for the Foundation in supporting grantees’ necessary organizational changes. POISE and its grantees need to continue to talk about the realities of such an emerging and ever-changing relationship (e.g., the power differential, the degree of autonomy, etc.), and how they can successfully design, navigate, and manage the relationship over time.



## OUTCOMES FOR POISE

Like its grantee organizations, POISE also had to answer the question: What does it take to do this work? During year two, POISE went through its own process of institutionalizing a family-centered approach. POISE also recognized the need to grow its capacity alongside the capacities of its grantees. In year three and beyond, POISE will need to address these concerns:

- what types of grants to award (e.g., for programming, for operations, or for both)
- the most effective timeline for funding (e.g., for how many years, and with what start and end dates)
- staff capacity and the long-term viability of each project, including the significant role the evaluator has played
- setting priorities and balancing each project or program with other work
- the Foundation's evolving relationship with each grantee (in particular, setting and managing the amount of each grantee's autonomy)
- funding, fundraising, and the sustainability of each program and organization
- integrating new grantees into a program (e.g., at what point should they be added, and should participants be added one at a time or as a cohort)

In this second year, POISE continued to use—and benefit from—multiple data collection methods. However, even with plans in place for including evaluations as part of the work, it was still a challenge for grantees to actually do them. This was addressed in year two by having a professional evaluator, paid for by POISE, do interviews and administer a survey with a sample of participants. This might be an effective way to deal with evaluations in year three. During this third year, it will also be important to revisit the evaluation design; consider (and perhaps test) a variety of data collection methods; and think about what approaches will be most effective and sustainable over time.



## THE BOTTOM LINE

POISE continues to meet the primary aims of the PPFi Demonstration Grant. The primary goals of this work have been to:

- shift the conceptual and practice paradigms of nonprofit organizations toward family-centered practice
- encourage and equip nonprofit organizations to strengthen Black families by uplifting, supporting, and leveraging the family as a core institution
- support programs that lead to improved family relationships (e.g., improved family communication, increased family time together, etc.) for Black families

As in year one, year two findings suggest that the Foundation's investments continue to drive Pittsburgh nonprofits toward each of those goals. In addition, program participants—particularly parents—overwhelmingly support this family-centered approach.

## MAKING THE CULTURAL SHIFT

POISE's PPFi Project seeks to move grantees—and the culture at large—toward a family-centered approach to improving the lives of Black Americans. This aligns with trends in both the field of philanthropy and many social science fields—including social work, early childhood work, youth development, family education, and family therapy.

As this work moves forward, it will be important for POISE to establish a more deliberate and strategic connection to the work in the relevant broader fields. This will help POISE find answers to these questions. It will also help the Foundation explore how it can help move the larger culture beyond programmatic interventions to a world in which the family unit is naturally elevated, supported, and leveraged.



These four PPFi programs seek to shore up the family as a core social institution—in ways that are organic, community based, and indigenous. In addition, instead of focusing just on people who are disadvantaged, as traditional social services and programs have done, the PPFi programs focus on strengthening Black families, without regard for whether they meet some specific criterion for need or “disadvantagedness.” The work being done in all PPFi programs supports the essential elements for the healthy functioning of any family.

Moving beyond the traditional problem-saturated approach also expands the range of activities that PPFi programs can offer.

When PPFi grantees focused less on family problems and more on helping to meet essential needs for family health and well-being (e.g., connection, fun time together, relationship skills, etc.), they often found creative and effective ways to meet those needs. Often, simply providing an opportunity, a time, and a place for family members to be together made a big difference—and was greatly appreciated by the families involved.

POISE's investment in PPFi programs, and PPFi grantees' advancements in the area of family-centered practice, continue to prove promising. As the project moves into a third year of funding, we are eager to see what emerges next.

# CREDITS

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## POISE FOUNDATION – VISION AND MISSION

We envision a Pittsburgh Region in which all members of the Black community are empowered and self-sufficient.

This vision is the core of the Foundation's philosophy and its approach to its work.

POISE's mission is:

To assist the Pittsburgh Region's Black community in achieving self-sustaining practices through strategic leadership, collective giving, grantmaking, and advocacy.

## ABOUT POISE FOUNDATION

POISE Foundation began in December of 1980 as the first public foundation in the state of Pennsylvania organized and managed by African Americans. The purpose of the Foundation is to develop and enhance the participation of Black philanthropists in the economic and social development of the Black community. For 38 years, the Foundation has been supporting programs that add value to the quality of life of Black Pittsburgh and its surrounding regions; and has expanded its services to impact Black families and their communities across the US. This was the vision of our founder Bernard H. Jones, Sr., of an empowered community, able to take care of itself.

POISE Foundation employs collective giving to enable donors to realize their philanthropic goals, pooling resources to provide funding to worthy organizations and causes. Donors may give to

the Foundation's general unrestricted endowment, where funds are pooled to make a greater impact on the Pittsburgh Region. Donors may also start their own individual endowment funds to support their specific charitable interests and organizations. As of December 2017, the Foundation manages 159 funds with a balance of over \$6,600,000.

Collective giving enables POISE to provide grants to programs and projects that primarily benefit the Black Community. The Foundation's grants are typically small, yet over its grantmaking history; POISE has impacted the Greater Pittsburgh Region and beyond with more than \$12,000,000 of direct financial support to organizations assisting our most underserved populations. The Foundation currently focuses its unrestricted endowed funds on programs and services that aim to Strengthen Black Families.



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