

Youth**Action**Net®

# CASE STUDY SERIES

---

**SailFuture:**

*SAILING EXPERIENCES SUPPORT  
AT-RISK YOUTH*

*A partnership between:*



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

School of Foreign Service  
Global Human Development Program



## **Introduction**

*This is one of a series of case studies produced by students enrolled in the Global Human Development Program at Georgetown University through its partnership with the International Youth Foundation (IYF). Students enrolled in a course exploring the role of social enterprises and social entrepreneurs were paired with young leaders of social ventures identified through the IYF's YouthActionNet® program. The students were given the assignment of analyzing the venture's assets, successful methodologies, and opportunities for investment to increase impact. Through this experiential learning process, the student consultants gained hands-on experience and exposure to the needs of social enterprises. The ventures, too, benefited from student insights into their strengths, areas for growth, and recommendations for enhancing their impact and sustainability. The Georgetown practicum is part of YouthActionNet's larger efforts to partner with institutions of higher learning around the globe to integrate social change into the academic experience and career interests of students.*

## **International Youth Foundation**

*The International Youth Foundation (IYF) invests in the extraordinary potential of young people. Founded in 1990, IYF builds and maintains a worldwide community of businesses, governments, and civil society organizations committed to empowering youth to be healthy, productive, and engaged citizens. IYF programs are catalysts of change that help young people obtain a quality education, gain employability skills, make healthy choices, and improve their communities.*

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

## **YouthActionNet®**

*Since 2001, YouthActionNet, a program of the International Youth Foundation, has provided founders of social ventures, ages 18 to 29, with the training, networking, coaching, funding, and advocacy opportunities they need to strengthen and scale their impact. These young social entrepreneurs have pioneered innovative solutions to critical local and global challenges, resulting in increased civic engagement, improved health, education reform, economic opportunity, environmental protection, and more inclusive societies. Our work is carried out through a network of 23 national and regional youth leadership institutes that collectively support over 1,350 young social entrepreneurs globally.*

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

## **Global Human Development Program at Georgetown University**

*The Global Human Development Program of Georgetown University is home to one of the world's premier master's degree programs in international development. An innovative, academically rigorous skills-based graduate program, the Master of Global Human Development degree prepares the next generation of development professionals to work with public sector agencies, private businesses, and non-profit organizations that advance development. Through coursework, extracurricular activity, and practical fieldwork experiences, our graduates develop the insights, skills, and experiences necessary to become leaders in development and make a difference in our global community.*

<https://ghd.georgetown.edu>

## INTRODUCTION

### ***Meet Mike Long, Founder and Executive Director of SailFuture***

Mike Long's teenage years weren't easy. While shuffling back and forth between his divorced parents and desperate for money and stability, Mike turned to theft, stealing credit cards, guns, and cars. He soon found himself expelled from high school and incarcerated in various residential juvenile justice facilities in Florida. His experiences in the juvenile justice system left him and his peers uninspired and in many cases, feeling oppressed.



While Mike ultimately emerged from the system and enrolled in New College of Florida where he majored in public policy, many of his peers were less fortunate, some remain incarcerated and others have passed away. Today, as the Founder and Executive Director of SailFuture, Mike is passionately directing his skills and time to developing a more effective and inspiring option for youth struggling in Florida's juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

**SailFuture uses team-based sailing experiences to support at-risk youth.**



### ***The Problem***

Today, approximately 29% of children in the US foster care system are arrested before their eighteenth birthday.<sup>1</sup> These young people are often referred to as “crossover youth,” as they are frequently shuffled between the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Traversing these two systems, crossover youth often face distinct challenges and have unique vulnerabilities, making social services hard to deliver effectively. Florida alone is home to an estimated 3,051 crossover youth.<sup>2</sup> According to SailFuture, neither the welfare nor juvenile justice systems work to effectively empower members of this particularly vulnerable and challenged population, and there are no specialized services in place to address these the unique set of needs for these young people. Instead, crossover youth often live in numerous group homes in a single year and frequently face insurmountable obstacles that prevent them from completing high school or obtaining consistent employment.

### ***The Solution***

A key component of SailFuture's mission is to provide comprehensive and holistic services that effectively empower members of this underserved population, and allow them to complete high

---

<sup>1</sup> Calabro, Dominic. *Challenges Facing Florida's Community-Based Child Welfare System*. Publication. Florida TaxWatch, Nov. 2015. Web. 19 Mar. 2017.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.djj.state.fl.us/research/reports/reports-and-data/interactive-data-reports/djj-dcf-profile-of-dually-served-crossover-youth/djj-dcf-dashboard>

school and obtain sustainable gainful employment. SailFuture's approach to addressing the challenges faced by crossover youth has evolved since the organization's founding in 2013. Until recently, SailFuture's primary programmatic emphasis was on facilitating a weekly mentorship program during which at-risk local high school youth are carefully paired with individual mentors from New College of Florida. Mentors and mentees, none of whom have prior sailing experience, learn how to sail on small two-person vessels. Through this experience of mutual learning, SailFuture's mentorship program provides a unique environment in which youth can bond and develop close relationships with their mentors. The sailing-based mentorship programming is complemented by educational and job training initiatives, with the primary intention of ensuring that participants graduate from high school.



While SailFuture's mentorship program has without a doubt been a great success to date, founder Mike Long explains that in order to maximize the organization's ability to positively impact the lives of Florida's crossover youth, SailFuture is expanding programming in a new direction. At SailFuture's outset, Mr. Long envisioned the organization's 65-foot sailboat, Defy the Odds, as an alternative to traditional jail—a place where youth

could serve court ordered sentences while at sea. However, SailFuture has been unable to convince Florida's Department of Juvenile Justice of the efficacy of this model and has struggled to obtain sufficient public funding for such programming. Instead, SailFuture is pivoting programming towards the construction of a residential care facility, where youth will live for 21 months following a three-month stint at sea. While sailing and programming aboard Defy the Odds will remain at the core of the SailFuture's model, the home will allow the organization to offer more holistic and full-time services to their beneficiaries while meeting state requirements.

The St. Petersburg-based SailFuture residential care facility officially opened in March 2017, after over a year of pilot programming that included the provision of services to 35 youth, all high-risk offenders. The new group home has been licensed by the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) and will be a critical component of a specialized, two-year program tailored to meet the needs of crossover youth between 15 and 17 years of age.



This long-term sea and land-based programmatic strategy seeks to create stability and foster deep personal transformations among the crossover youth served by SailFuture. The journey creates a unique opportunity for youth to build meaningful relationships with their peers, teacher, youth counselor, and captain. This home will allow SailFuture to provide additional, round-the-clock and extended services to crossover youth, satisfying the requirements of the Department of Children and Families. SailFuture is also thinking about replication of this unique model and locations for additional residential programs in different Florida communities.



### ***Operational Model***

SailFuture is a registered, stand-alone, non-profit organization. While the majority of SailFuture's revenue is derived from in-kind donations, loans, government and foundation-based grants, and private donations, the organization also creatively generates some revenue by harnessing one of its most powerful assets: sailing.

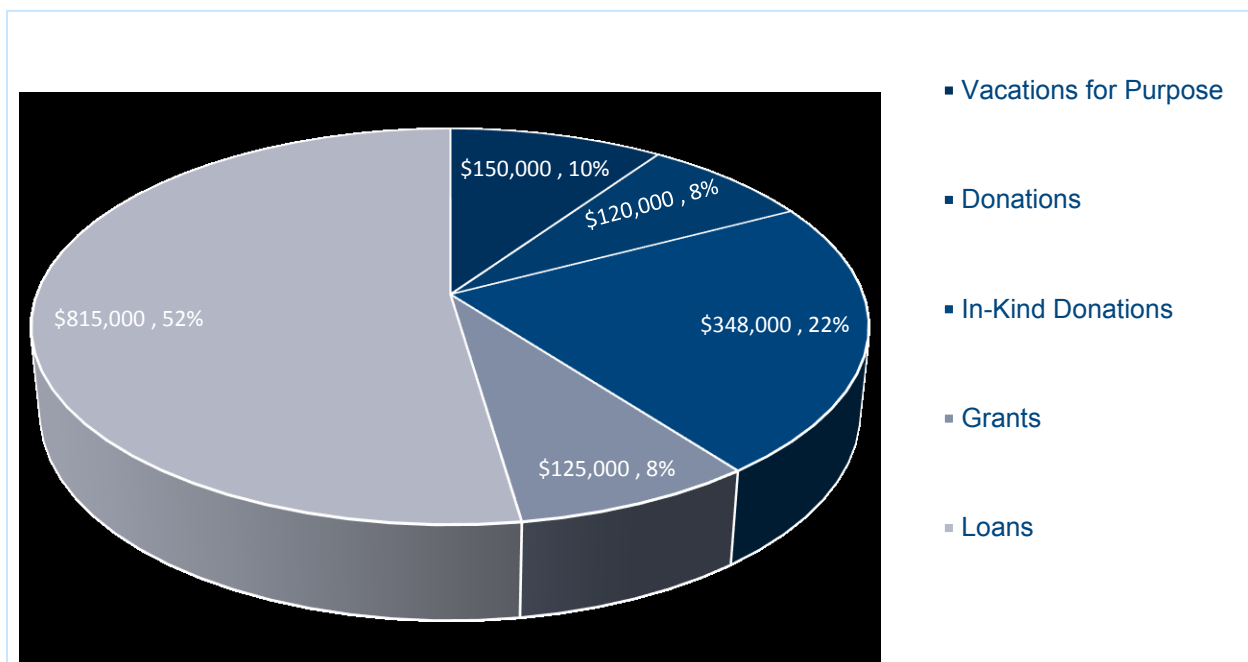
SailFuture's primary programmatic component has been the weekly mentoring program between at-risk youth and New College Florida. To date, 120 youth have participated in SailFuture's mentorship program, of which around 100 have gone on to graduate from high school. SailFuture hopes to grow the mentorship program in the year to come, and is considering expanding the initiative by partnering with a second university in St. Petersburg, Florida. Should this occur, SailFuture will likely hire a new staff member to oversee the management of the two mentorship programs.

The newer programmatic venture is the residential care facility in St. Petersburg, Florida, licensed by the state. Six youth, all in the foster care system, referred to SailFuture by their contracting provider, Eckerd Kids, and subsequently interviewed and selected by SailFuture staff, live in the home. Initially, these youth will undergo program orientations, land-based sailing training sessions, and swimming lessons. They will then depart on a three-month sailing voyage, navigating more than 1,000 nautical miles along the Florida coastline and stopping in ports along the way to lead week-long service learning projects. The boat will also be home to a fully accredited partnership school that the youth will attend during their voyage. Youth will also work with a youth counselor on their goals and personal development plans while at sea.

Upon returning to St. Petersburg, youth transition from life at sea to living in the SailFuture home. The same SailFuture staff who were at sea, including a youth counselor and teacher, live with the six youth for the remaining twenty-one months. After the resident's eighteenth birthday, he will enter the SailFuture Graduate Living Community, which provides a wide network of support, including job and education assistance and employment opportunities. In the coming year, based on an evaluation of the impact and sustainability of the new programming, SailFuture will investigate the viability of scaling and opening additional group homes, allowing the organization to receive additional state-based funding specifically directed towards supporting the care of teenagers in the group homes, which would further facilitate potential growth.

When SailFuture is not utilizing Defy the Odds for youth programming, the organization offers Vacations with Purpose. For a cost of approximately \$1,200, individuals can enjoy guided sailing voyages in the Caribbean offered by SailFuture staff. Youth alumni from SailFuture's programs will also often join the vacation trips as crew. From 2015-16, 150 guests purchased weeklong sailing vacations, raising \$150,000 in revenue. In addition, while on Vacation voyages, individuals get a front-row seat to SailFuture's programming and often establish close allegiances to the organization's work. This frequently translates into additional donations to SailFuture following the completion of the vacation.

*Figure 1: SailFuture Revenue to Date*



## KEY ASSETS AND SUCCESSFUL METHODOLOGIES

Throughout SailFuture's history, the organization has employed various unique and promising methodologies to deliver holistic and effective services to crossover youth. In some cases, these methodologies have been developed as a result of innovative responses to challenges and the need to adapt services to the dynamic needs of at-risk youth. SailFuture's most valuable assets and methodologies include the use of sailing as a tool for community building and empowerment and the emphasis on wraparound, holistic, and long-term social service delivery to youth.

## ***Sailing as a Tool for Community Building and Youth Empowerment***

Through team-based sailing, SailFuture teaches responsibility, inspires confidence, and builds the foundation of lifelong friendships among the youth they mentor.

For example, in the case of SailFuture's high school mentorship program, neither mentees nor mentors have any previous sailing experience, establishing an equal playing field. Working together, mentors and mentees learn to sail on board two-person college racing boats. The craft are sensitive to the slightest change in weight, capsize easily, and require strong communication and synergy between the sailors to operate. At sea with only each other, mentees gain important life skills and confidence, and genuine friendships form organically.



Sailing will remain at the core of SailFuture's activities as the organization pivots towards the establishment of a residential program in St. Petersburg. Six youth selected to live in the new group home will initially embark on a three-month sailing voyage, during which they will attend school on the boat and complete service learning projects at various ports on the Florida coast. These will include, but are not limited to, assisting in construction projects, serving food at homeless shelters, and contributing to environmental initiatives in state and national parks.

SailFuture's use of sailing as a means of empowerment and community building distinguishes the organization from other youth mentorship programs. While other group homes and mentorship programs may offer similar job training and educational programming, SailFuture's beneficiaries spend three months on a boat together as a rite of passage, team-building experience, with the goal that youth will develop a strong attachment to one another and a commitment to the program and themselves. SailFuture suggests that the unique bonding experience of learning how to sail is at the core of the reason that their graduates enjoy a significantly lower recidivism rate than youth serving time in state-run facilities. Numerous studies confirm the efficacy of mentoring-based juvenile justice programming in reducing recidivism, such as that employed by SailFuture.<sup>3</sup>



## ***Wraparound, Holistic Programming at a Competitive Cost***

In many cases, social services aimed at assisting foster youth fail to provide necessary consistent, committed, and full-time attention to those in care. For example, in juvenile detention centers and welfare group homes, staff typically work twelve hour shifts three times per week and are more likely to view their roles as babysitters than mentors. On average, according to Mike Long, group home staff members at such centers remain in their jobs for only four to six

---

<sup>3</sup> Lipsey, Mark W. "The primary factors that characterize effective interventions with juvenile offenders: A meta-analytic overview." *Victims and offenders* 4.2 (2009): 124-147.

months, and job turnover rates are as high as 80% among youth welfare service employees in some parts of Florida. Also of concern is the fact that when youth leave the justice or welfare systems, social service providers often fail to maintain contact with them or to provide effective guidance as youth transition back to life on their own, a failure that increases the likelihood of recidivism. SailFuture is unique in that deeply committed and carefully vetted staff members offer holistic programming to small groups of crossover youth as part of a long-term program. Staff members sail with youth for three months and then live, full time, at the group home upon their return to St. Petersburg. This provides stability to youth and ensures that they can build lifelong relationships with the beneficiaries.

Additionally, SailFuture offers wraparound services, including weekly individual and group-based counseling to address complex trauma, and a fully accredited partnership school with options for both high school education and GED attainment. Further, SailFuture provides transition services to the youth who depart the program, ensuring that they retain lifelong connections to the SailFuture community.

The provision of youth based social services is an expensive venture. In Florida, it costs the state approximately \$55,000 per year to incarcerate a single youth in government-run juvenile detention facilities. As discussed, these costly facilities are in many cases ineffective in the delivery of services and regularly fail to provide necessary support to the youth. SailFuture, on the other hand, delivers holistic wraparound services at a significantly lower cost per beneficiary of \$35,000 per year. In other words, SailFuture is offering more effective services at a highly competitive cost.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTMENT

### ***Expand Vacation with Purpose Program***

As SailFuture considers expanding by opening additional group homes in different areas of Florida, the organization will need to consider opportunities to leverage existing and create new funding sources. SailFuture's Vacations with Purpose program is an innovative revenue source already in existence.

SailFuture would benefit from expanding the Vacations program and could derive significant additional revenue from doing so. However, currently, the program's ability to expand is limited by the fact that the same vessel is used for both the vacations and youth-based programming. Thus, during the time that youth are using the boat, it is impossible for SailFuture to derive revenue from the Vacations program. In order to overcome this obstacle, SailFuture should acquire additional boats.



SailFuture obtained this current vessel from an in-kind donation in December 2013. Founder Mike Long explains that he found it very difficult to secure a vessel at this time, as SailFuture remained an abstract idea in his head and he did not have any proven results to point to when seeking the donation. Today, however, SailFuture has established itself as a leading youth-based social service provider in Florida. SailFuture's successes have been recognized by the Annie E. Casey Foundation



and more than 20 local and state media affiliates. Additionally, SailFuture is a registered non-profit, has forged strong relationships with the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, Florida Department of Children and Families, and various school districts, and recently became a licensed and funded child welfare agency for the state of Florida.

As SailFuture seeks to expand programming, it should leverage this now strong reputation when approaching various yacht clubs and boat distributors in Florida in search of additional sailboats to be donated or sold at largely discounted costs. Donors may be enticed through the exchange of various promotional opportunities on the boat. The acquisition of an additional vessel would allow SailFuture to employ one boat to derive revenue year-round via its Vacations program with the other directed towards youth-based programming.

### ***Clarify Model and Increase Visibility***

SailFuture is largely dependent on grants and private donations. In order to maximize revenue from these sources, SailFuture would benefit from the increased production and dissemination of creative marketing materials that clearly highlight the novelty of the organization's approach, successes to date, and long-term vision. Particular emphasis should be given to the fact that to date, SailFuture has delivered services to 155 youth (120 via the mentorship program and 35 as part of pilot programs that preceded the opening of the first group home) at a cost that is significantly less than state-based alternatives. Further, at present, SailFuture does not enjoy a significant online presence and it is somewhat difficult to obtain a holistic understanding of the program's unique approach, vision, and results from its website. A successful marketing campaign that clarifies these aspects of the SailFuture model and raises awareness about the organization would be especially valuable now, as the organization considers opportunities to expand by opening additional group homes.



Traditional marketing materials, such as advertisements, brochures, and postings on online platforms must articulate SailFuture's mission and theory of change, clearly describing the organization's various programs. This is especially important at present, as SailFuture's model is in a stage of evolution, and the organization increases emphasis on group home programming. The nature in which the group home program and the traditional mentoring program will co-exist and complement one another, for example, should be clearly articulated. Further, the means by which the Vacations with Purpose program directly supports SailFuture's work should also be clarified.

In order to increase SailFuture's visibility, traditional marketing material should be complemented with alternative media campaigns that leverage SailFuture's alluring model. One possibility would be to invest in filming a documentary chronicling the story of the first six participants in SailFuture's group home program as they prepare for and embark on a three-month sailing voyage. A story that tells the story of challenge and transformation at sea is sure to be a hit. The production of a video of this kind could lead to a surge in private donations, as SailFuture increasingly becomes a household name.

## CONCLUSION

Through the provision of holistic, wraparound services that foster the development of close personal relationships and facilitate meaningful transformations at significantly lower costs than state-run equivalents, SailFuture has demonstrated that there is a better way to provide residential care to Florida's crossover youth. Mike Long and the SailFuture team are deeply committed to the venture and have skillfully harnessed passion and technical knowledge to grow the organization and have worked to dynamically pivot the SailFuture model when necessary in order to overcome various challenges. As the organization evolves and potentially opens additional residential care facilities in Florida, SailFuture will increasingly be able to leverage outcomes to influence assumed best practices and to disrupt the types of youth-based social service programs that are funded and prioritized in Florida.

## FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT SAILFUTURE

- [SailFuture Website](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- Twitter: @SailFutureFL
- Video: [Vacations With Purpose](#)
- Video: [SailFuture Odyssey - Sailing SV 'Defy the Odds'](#)

## AUTHOR

Alex Humphrey  
MA, Conflict Resolution  
Georgetown University  
[aph57@georgetown.edu](mailto:aph57@georgetown.edu)

---

*This case study series was made possible thanks to support from:*



**LAUREATE**  
INTERNATIONAL  
UNIVERSITIES®

