



The Ballmer Group and YAP -- FAQ

What is the Ballmer Group?

The Ballmer Group is a philanthropy founded by Steve and Connie Ballmer. According to their website, The Ballmer Group supports “efforts to improve economic mobility for children and families in the United States who are disproportionately likely to remain in poverty. Through our philanthropy and civic activism, we focus on four levers of change that, together, hold promise to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.”

Why did The Ballmer Group decide to invest in YAP like this?

We believe this investment is an affirmation of our impact and our approach to working in partnership with families and communities. Our more than 40 years of working with young people and families has demonstrated the effectiveness of the YAP model for people who would otherwise be in some type of institutional placement. Being isolated from one’s family and community decreases economic mobility and increases the chances that families living in poverty will remain in poverty. Our growth from one town in Pennsylvania to almost half the country may have also contributed. We also believe that our commitment to have an impact beyond service provision – through systems and policy change is an important role for a service provider. Lastly, thought perhaps most important – YAP is and always has been a mission-driven organization guided for core delivery principles and focused exclusively on providing families with support in their homes and communities. We have never run residential centers and we never will.

What does the \$20M donation from The Ballmer Group mean to Youth Advocate Programs?

Youth Advocate Programs (YAP) Inc. is extremely grateful to The Ballmer Group co-founders Connie Ballmer and former Microsoft CEO and LA Clippers owner Steve Ballmer for the \$20M grant to YAP. To YAP, the grant is a game changer that affirms, supports and advances our mission.

The Ballmer Group grant will help YAP realize our goal of helping more people who would otherwise be subject to some kind of institutional placement access support in the community. It will also help us change systems’ reliance on institutional placement.

What does Youth Advocate Programs do?

YAP keeps young people and individuals at home and with their families with the support they need and works within communities and systems to keep them out of institutions.

YAP matches individuals we serve with neighborhood advocates; these are paid mentors who partner with the young people, individuals and families we serve. Our advocates help these individuals design blueprints for their lives and connects them and their families with community resources and tools that reinforce their foundations.

Since 1975, YAP has served those who often have nowhere else to go, all while adhering to our unique policy of never turning away or kicking anyone out of its programs.

YAP partners with juvenile justice, child welfare, mental health, intellectual and developmental disability/autism, public health, educational, substance abuse, workforce development and other local agencies.

While connecting youth and adults facing adversity with resources or personalized toolkits to restructure and reinforce their foundations, we help these individuals identify their own gifts and skills and ways to give back to their communities.

Where does YAP operate programs?

YAP is in 100 communities in 23 states (including Washington, DC), serving as an at-home/community-based alternative for youth and vulnerable adults who would otherwise be in some type of out-of-home placement, including prison or residential treatment. We're currently serving 13,000 individuals and families.

Does the grant from The Ballmer Group mean you will rely less on public funding?

No. The Ballmer Group grant bolsters with private dollars the funding YAP currently receives, largely from public sources. We still believe that government systems have a responsibility to meet the needs of its community members through the least restrictive alternative by funding community- and home-based programs over institutions. Right now the bias is towards funding institutional placement and allocating far fewer dollars for community programs. So we still need to rely on public funding if we want to change systems.

However, The Ballmer Group investment in YAP enables us to increase our impact in ways we cannot accomplish through government funding alone. Some examples include building capacity to improve technology, HR, leverage our staff and client experiences to change systems, hearts and minds, invest in research to further support our model, and provide retention and recruitment incentives to current and prospective staff.

The Ballmer Group gift also serves as a great example for other private and corporate foundations and individual donors interested in ways they can help strengthen and scale a proven model for changing the trajectory of individuals, families and communities that face adversity.

The Ballmer Group grant is particularly a great example for those believing in the philosophy of empowering individuals and families with tools that stabilize many aspects of their lives -- social, economic, health, spiritual, emotional and other drivers that are at the root of the immediate challenge.

How will Youth Advocate Programs use The Ballmer Group grant funds?

YAP has implemented a strategy to apply the funding to increase our impact as a safe, successful home-based alternative to ineffective, costly youth prisons and other institutions for young people and vulnerable adults.

Since receiving the Ballmer Group grant last year, we've taken time to meet with our board of directors and senior staff to carefully develop and institute principles guiding how we will utilize the funding to accelerate our growth and strengthen our impact in reducing institutional placement, improving economic mobility, reducing racial disparities and advancing social justice for youth and families.

YAP's initial investments include:

- Developing and launching intensive services to help commercially sexually exploited children;
- "YAPWORX," an economic opportunities-through-skill development program;
- A child welfare substance use program;
- Intensive services and support for transition-age youth;
- Frontline staff recruitment, retention and training programs;
- Enhancing our infrastructure with updated information technology systems and software that make capturing and recording important data less time-consuming; and
- Improving marketing, communications and fund development capabilities to raise our profile and attract more donors and investors looking to invest in evidence-based solutions to their communities' most pressing challenges and opportunities.

Future priorities include partnering with potential local referral agencies to launch programs in states we currently don't serve. Some grant dollars will go towards strengthening the YAP Endowment Fund - which is currently supported primarily through payroll deductions -- to provide more education and work training scholarships for youth and families in our programs. We expect to direct some Ballmer Group dollars to our "Push the Needle" flex fund, which helps those in its programs in need of life start-up money for apartment or security deposits and other basic needs to help transition into adulthood or get their lives started in a new, positive direction.

How do we know Youth Advocate Programs works?

We do not take the responsibility of working with people in need lightly. We are committed to excellence and collect and evaluate our programmatic outcomes regularly to assess and make changes when necessary. YAP's outcomes are documented in the [evidence/outcomes](#) segment of our website, but to give just one example of our effectiveness:

In spring 2014 the John Jay Research and Evaluation Center published a series of short briefs that looked at 3,523 juvenile justice involved youth ages 11-18. Nearly all, 90%, had prior legal dispositions including 30% who had prior felonies. More than 1/5 had at least one prior out-of-home placement and kids stayed in the program for an average of four months, with some youth receiving services for as long as 20 months. Yet, despite their histories, 86% remained arrest free while in the program and 93% were still living in their communities at the time of their discharge from the program. In a separate brief, the Research and Evaluation Center looked at 1,851 YAP youth who were in the juvenile justice system for misdemeanors, status offenses and felonies. The use of secure confinement for youth decreased, regardless of the severity of the offense. Six to twelve months after discharge from YAP, only 5% were living in secure facilities."

YAP will use Ballmer Group funds for continued and additional research initiatives and partnerships that will help us document, learn from and inform the broader field with lessons from our growing body of evidence affirming the YAP model's effectiveness. This investment will also strengthen our impact with innovative pilot programs related to system change, racial and social justice and YAP's [Safely Home Campaign](#), which includes data and resources about various systems.

Don't you believe institutionalization is the best choice for some, especially hardened criminals and people with severe developmental or psychological disorders?

Our model is a relationship-based model focused on using a person's gifts and strengths to address challenges. Every person has gifts to give, even those society labels as "hardened criminals" or who are marginalized for their mental health or developmental challenges. Our belief is that almost everyone can be safely served at home and in the community with the right supports. We don't believe in throwing away kids or people or dismissing them as defective and deserving only of institutional placement due to a disability or mental health diagnosis. We have 40 years' experience of seeing our model work for people with the most complex needs. This proves that whatever can be done in an institution can be done better and more cost effectively in communities, with intensive family support.

Why is YAP pursuing pilot programs dealing with reducing racial disparities and advancing social justice?

All data point to the fact that our justice system is imbalanced with poor people and racial minorities being disproportionately arrested, incarcerated and serving longer sentences for similar accusations, charges and offenses. This is the same for children.

Let's look at one state, for example, New Jersey, where YAP is celebrating 40 years of service this year. New Jersey has the third highest black/white commitment disparity rate in the country. According to statistics from a report called, *Bring Our Children Home*:

- Of the young people currently committed to a state juvenile facility, an estimated three quarters are Black.
- Also, in New Jersey, Black kids are more than 24 times more likely to be committed to a secure juvenile facility than their white counterparts even though Black and white children have similar rates of offending.
- Hispanic young people are nearly five and a half times more likely to be sent to a juvenile facility than their white peers.
- And according to WNYC's 2016 report, Kids in Prison, nearly 90 percent of youth prosecuted as adults in the state are Black or Hispanic.
- This is systematic. Black students – even as young as pre-school – are more likely than their white peers to face suspension.

While New Jersey is just one state. It is representative of the problem. The disparities issue with institutionalizing youth is across systems. According to the Children's Defense Fund's 2017 *The State of America's Children* report, in 22 states, the percent of Black children in foster care is double that of Black children.

Why did you wait a year to publicize the gift?

We were so grateful to have been selected. A gift like this is both unprecedented for us and also transformative. We wanted to take some time to be deliberate about how we could leverage this investment to best advance our mission – to keep people safely home and with their families, out of institutional placement. We took much of the 1st year to strategize around how to use the investment. We are now entering year 2 and ready to share.

How can others who might want to invest in YAP learn more about your organization?

To learn more about YAP, please go to www.yapinc.org.