

YOUTH SERVICES

FILED 4/17/2023 3:22PM

SHARE

Think of Us Receives \$47.5 Million from TED's Audacious Project

BY SARA TIANO

Think of Us has received a 5-year, \$47.5 million grant from the Audacious Project, a social-impact funding initiative within the TED nonprofit, best known for the famous TED Talks. The grant provides nearly half of the \$100 million that organization is seeking to raise to help build a new child welfare system “that invests in child and family well-being.”

Think of Us Founder and CEO Sixto Cancel said the grant will allow the organization to build capacity for research, technology and data to center the expertise of people with lived child welfare experience in reform work. Cancel said a lack of capital has historically hamstrung the child welfare world from collecting the data that can help propel lawmakers to allocate funding and pass meaningful reforms, and that he’s excited to help the child welfare field bridge that data gap.



“This is a win for the field. This is an opportunity to bridge the tech field and their funders into child welfare. This is a moment for us to all lean in together, to be able to push further for all of us,” Cancel told Youth Services Insider.

In a [video](#) announcing the new funding, Cancel highlighted the need for a comprehensive approach to preventing child welfare removals; strategies that allow foster youth to live with family members or other adults they know and trust; and support for young people transitioning out of care.

“There is a growing consensus that we need to keep families together whenever possible, but we haven’t found a path to get there yet.” he stated in a press release. “This is where Think of Us comes in: We are building on the work of the

organizations who have come before us to center lived experience and bring unique data and tech capabilities to the field.”



Sixto Cancel, CEO and founder of Think of Us.

[The Audacious Project](#) is a collaborative funding initiative housed within TED, a nonprofit media group “devoted to spreading ideas,” largely through the TED Talk format that features expert speakers sharing their insight. Cancel is slated to give a TED Talk on April 19 about shifting the child welfare system to focus on keeping children connected to their families.

Dozens of high-level philanthropic foundations are members of the funding project, including billionaire Mackenzie Scott, who’s made [headlines](#) in recent months for enormous donations to child welfare and youth justice initiatives.

The grant is one of the largest investments made to a systems-change organization led by a person of color with lived foster care experience, Cancel said. He founded Think of Us in 2015, driven to reform child welfare after growing up in Connecticut’s foster care system, being adopted into an abusive home and, as a result, struggling with housing insecurity as a teen.

Cancel and his organization have been at the forefront of the national foster care reform movement for years, working with everyone from [White House officials](#) to [Silicon Valley tech executives](#) to raise awareness and innovate solutions to what Cancel and many others consider a broken child welfare system.

Last year, Think of Us [launched a Center for Lived Experience](#) that conducts and disseminates participatory research aimed at leveraging the expertise of people whose families have been impacted by child protective services to drive reform. It also runs a “Systems Change Lab” that works to develop strategies to develop evidence-based policies more quickly than the historically slow pace of government reform.

During the pandemic, the organization built a network of lived-experience experts that it turned to to collect information on what support was needed to weather the crisis. Through this work, Think of Us created a data briefing for Congress providing a snapshot of more than 27,000 people’s stories, which Cancel said helped compel lawmakers to allocate [\\$400 million in pandemic relief](#) funding to support foster youth.

NEWSLETTER SIGN UP

Receive weekly updates from Imprint News

EMAIL ADDRESS*

SIGN UP

The new funding will allow Think of Us to build out this database of lived experience to help fellow organizations in the field gather the needed perspective to inform policy and program development. As Cancel explains it, they’ve built the infrastructure to text thousands of former foster youth, birth parents and caregivers, and to use word-analysis technology to identify trends in their responses.

“Think of Us has worked with states and counties across the country to prove that their unique approach combining

Audacious Project. “We’re so excited to see the impact they’ll be able to create as they scale this work up with the support of the Audacious community.”



Listen [here](#) to an in-depth interview with Sixto Cancel on The Imprint Weekly Podcast.

EXPLORE THE IMPRINT

[child welfare](#) [foster youth](#) [TED](#) [Think of Us](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sara Tiano

Sara Tiano is a senior reporter for The Imprint.

 stiano@imprintnews.org

[VIEW ALL ARTICLES BY SARA](#) ▶

Subscribe Today

FOR EXCLUSIVE *YOUTH SERVICES INSIDER* CONTENT.



Learn more about Accenture's child welfare practice.



let's amplify our impact

social current
Activating the Power of the Social Sector

Engagement Packages	COA Accreditation
Consulting Services	Learning Solutions

learn more

Your support allows *The Imprint* to provide independent, nonpartisan daily news covering the issues faced by vulnerable children and families.

 **DONATE** or  **SUBSCRIBE**

The Imprint

YOUTH & FAMILY NEWS

The Imprint is an independent, nonprofit daily news publication dedicated to covering child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health and educational issues faced by vulnerable children and families.

 *Search The Imprint*

GOT A TIP?

TIPS@IMPRINTNEWS.ORG

(213) 379-5359

INFO@IMPRINTNEWS.ORG



© 2023 THE IMPRINT

[TERMS OF USE](#) [PRIVACY POLICY](#)

