

# 2022 Evaluation Report

*Prepared for the Conrad N. Hilton Foster Youth Initiative*

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This report reflects events and activities that occurred in 2021 and 2022.

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# Introduction

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's (the Foundation) Foster Youth Initiative (the Initiative) strives to ensure that transition-age foster youth (referred to as foster youth or young people throughout this report) ages 14-26<sup>4</sup> in Los Angeles County (LA), New York City (NYC), and Atlanta "lead healthy, meaningful, and choice-filled lives."<sup>5</sup> Since 2012, the Foundation has invested in a network of grantee partners who have implemented innovative programs and policy changes related to education and employment, strengthened systems, and improved the sharing of knowledge and coordination of data within the field.

In 2021, the Initiative began its five-year strategic initiative, [Strategy25](#), which expanded previous investments to include grantees working in the areas of safe and stable housing and high-quality mental health services.<sup>6</sup> Strategy25 also committed to support foster youth by addressing the needs of caregivers and supporting efforts related to youth engagement, advocacy partnerships, funder collaborations, and improving cross-sector data infrastructure on a national level through the Foundation's grantees. The strategy architecture, including the Initiative's specific sub-strategies, is depicted in Figure 1.

While the Initiative and its grantees continue to support all youth who have been in foster care, four under-supported populations are identified in Strategy25 for which the Initiative seeks to advance equitable outcomes: youth of color, youth who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation, expectant and parenting youth, and LGBTQ+ youth.

Within the first two years of Strategy25, the Initiative has invested over \$65 million to fund service, advocacy, and research organizations that support foster youth.<sup>7</sup>

**Through its grantees, the Initiative reaches an estimated 19,200 transition-age foster youth in LA and NYC<sup>1</sup>**

- 13,900 current and former foster youth ages 16-24 live in LA<sup>2</sup>
- 5,300 current and former foster youth ages 16-24 live in NYC<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Initiative's investments in system reform efforts seek to improve the lives of all transition-age foster youth living in LA and NYC; therefore, this estimate includes current and former foster youth ages 16-24 as of July 1, 2021 in LA and NYC.

<sup>2</sup> LA youth in care as of July 1, 2021, rounded to the nearest hundred. Includes youth in foster care who are supervised under the probation system. Source: CCWIP Reports. CWS/CMS 2021 Quarter 3 Extract. Data were obtained from the University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project and provided to Child Trends by DCFS on April 11, 2022. Former foster youth counts include youth who were in foster care on or after their 16th birthday for at least eight days and were not in care on July 1, 2021, by age (ages 16-24) on July 1, 2021. Rounded to the nearest hundred. Source: CWS/CMS Datamart as of January 9, 2022 and provided Child Trends by DCFS on April 11, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> NYC youth in care ages 16-20 as of July 1, 2021, rounded to the nearest hundred. Excludes youth whose entry reason is juvenile delinquency and youth in care for less than eight days. Former foster youth counts include youth who were in foster care on or after their 16th birthday for at least eight days and were not in care on July 1, 2021, by age (ages 16-24) on July 1, 2021. These counts exclude youth whose entry reason is juvenile delinquency. Rounded to the nearest hundred. Source: New York State's CCRS and CNNX database as of March 25, 2022 provided by New York City Administration for Children's Services. Youth who remain in placement after they turn 21 years old until they have a suitable housing plan are not in CCRS or CNNX.

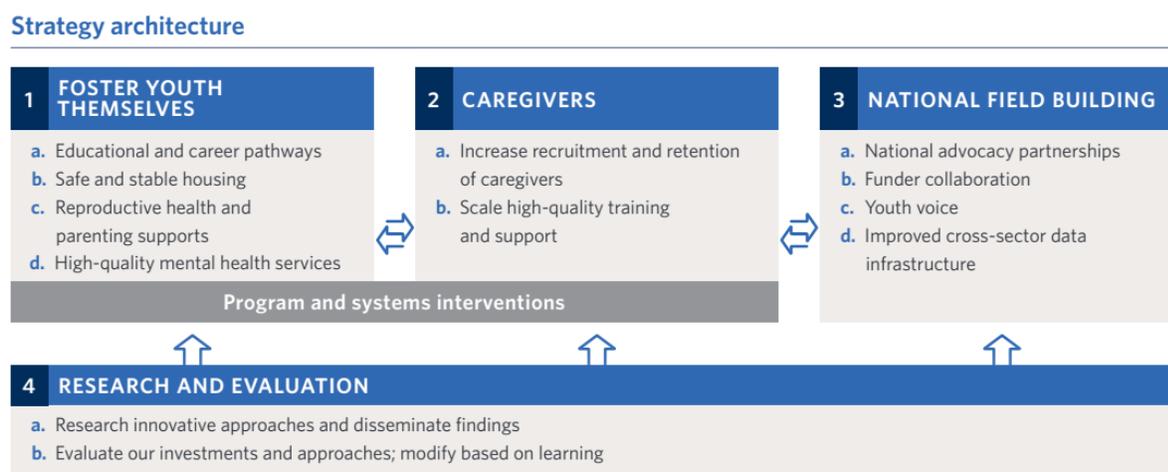
<sup>4</sup> In 2022, the Initiative began a small number of investments serving foster youth in middle school.

<sup>5</sup> Conrad N. Hilton Foundation (2023). *Foster Youth: Strategy25 Summary*. [https://www.hiltonfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Foster-Youth\\_2023.pdf](https://www.hiltonfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Foster-Youth_2023.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> The Initiative has identified four sub-strategies, or topic areas within which it strives to improve individual- and systems-level outcomes for youth: education and career pathways, safe and stable housing, reproductive health and parenting supports, and high-quality mental health services. In addition, the Initiative has identified two sub-strategies to improve outcomes for caregivers: recruitment and retention and high-quality training and support. See 'Figure 1: Strategy25 Architecture.'

<sup>7</sup> Total investments include grants made prior to 2021 that were still active during Strategy25; information obtained from grant write-ups and progress reports.

**Figure 1. Strategy architecture<sup>8</sup>**



**Source:** Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

As the Initiative’s evaluation partner, Child Trends conducts evaluation activities; elevates evaluation findings to inform Strategy25; and disseminates learnings from LA and NYC to the Initiative, its grantees and partners, and the broader child welfare field. In 2022, Child Trends established an Evaluation Advisory Board comprised of young people with lived experience in foster care from LA and NYC. Advisory Board members play a key role in Child Trends’ evaluation of Strategy25, providing critical perspectives on how findings are interpreted, as well as helping develop recommendations for the Foundation. Their perspectives are reflected throughout this report.

This report summarizes progress made in 2021 and 2022 toward the Initiative’s Strategy25 five-year goals in LA and NYC. In 2022, the Initiative expanded its work to Atlanta to support its national field-building efforts; progress in this jurisdiction will be included in Child Trends’ subsequent annual evaluation reports.

We present youth- and caregiver-level outcomes to assess whether the systems responsible for the care and education of transition-age foster youth have made improvements and where significant reforms still need to occur. The data show areas where the child welfare and other youth-serving systems must improve to fully meet the needs of foster youth.

There are specific groups of young people in foster care who experience disparate adverse impacts (e.g., youth of color and Black youth in particular, LGBTQ+ youth). These young people have unique needs, and the Initiative is striving to provide additional support to them. LA and NYC’s child welfare agencies—the LA Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and NYC Administration for Children’s Services (ACS)—have also created internal offices in recent years committed to developing more equitable policies and practices.

## Methodology and Data

The Foundation identified five 5-year goals (see ‘Findings’ on pages 7-10) to track the Initiative’s progress, understand the contributions of the Foundation and its grantees, and identify opportunities for continued progress. Beyond these goals, Child Trends also monitors youth- and caregiver-level and advocacy indicators identified for each of Strategy25’s sub-strategies and jurisdictions (see Snapshots for findings by

<sup>8</sup> Conrad N. Hilton Foundation (2023). *Foster Youth: Strategy25 Summary*. [https://www.hiltonfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Foster-Youth\\_2023.pdf](https://www.hiltonfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Foster-Youth_2023.pdf).

sub-strategy). Indicator data presented for LA and NYC are not directly comparable, as each jurisdiction has different measurement approaches and policy contexts.

The evaluation team systematically explored the Initiative’s progress toward its 5-year goals using the quantitative and qualitative data gathered between September 2021 and October 2022:

- Quantitative data:<sup>9</sup>
  - Administrative and survey data collected and made publicly available by public agencies
  - Data requested from and provided by public agencies and advocacy organizations
- Qualitative data:
  - Public documents including reports published by public agencies, research published by independent organizations, academic literature, policy documents and webinars, advocacy reports, and media (e.g., press releases and news reports)
  - Progress reports and grant write-ups documenting grant activities, and grantee publications
  - Information provided by the Foundation’s grantees (n=62) through focus groups with staff members and executive staff members
  - Interviews with stakeholders (n=12), including staff members and executive staff members of public agencies
  - A focus group of caregivers in LA (n=5)
  - Discussions with Foundation staff members

We explored progress, barriers, and opportunities for each sub-strategy using the Strategy25 Strategy Evaluation Framework detailed in our evaluation plan. This framework focuses on six levers to contextualize the progress made to improve outcomes across the Initiative’s youth- and caregiver-level indicators:<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1.** Strategy25 Strategy Evaluation Framework

	<b>System reform efforts:</b> New policies, policy monitoring and implementation activities (e.g., technical assistance and training), collective impact initiatives, coalition-building, and communication to the field on system reform priorities
	<b>Practice interventions:</b> Programs serving youth and caregivers, and public investments to develop/scale/sustain programs
	<b>Youth voice:</b> Youth engagement in systems reform and practice interventions, developing and implementing recommendations, and reframing/centering the narrative
	<b>Strategies to improve outcomes for focal populations:</b> Use of specific strategies to improve outcomes for youth of color, expectant and parenting youth, commercially sexually exploited youth, and LGBTQ+ youth
	<b>Research and evaluation:</b> Data and research used to drive systems reform and practice interventions
	<b>Foundation leadership:</b> Leadership, agenda setting, and partnership-building

<sup>9</sup> Administrative data are housed in live data systems that are regularly updated, potentially resulting in minor changes in data points over time. This report reflects data as of the date obtained from the source.

<sup>10</sup> McKlinton et. al (2021). *Foster Youth Initiative Strategy 25 Evaluation Plan*. Developed for The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

The Evaluation Advisory Board identified education, postsecondary education, and mental health as sub-strategies of focus. Advisory Board members reviewed qualitative and quantitative data for these sub-strategies, offering their interpretations of the trends, contributing factors, and relevance/accuracy of the data, while also generating recommendations for the Foundation and its partners, reflected throughout this report.

A list of grantees by jurisdiction and their strategy/strategies of focus is provided in the Appendix. Names of grantees are **bolded in blue** throughout this report.

## Findings

### 5-Year Goals<sup>11</sup>

Goal	Status
<p>75 percent of transition-age foster youth and 60 percent of key subgroups graduate high school in five years</p>	<p>In LA, the 5-year graduation rate for transition-age youth in foster care reached 66 percent in the 2020-2021 school year, an increase from 56 percent in the 2017-2018 school year. However, the graduation rate decreased slightly to 62 percent in 2021-2022.<sup>12, 13</sup></p> <p><b>Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI)</b> reported a 30 percent 5-year graduation rate for NYC foster youth in the 2018-2019 school year, increasing from 24 percent in the 2014-2015 school year.<sup>14</sup> <b>CIDI</b> has been funded by the Foundation to replicate this study with graduates from 2020, 2021, and 2022; however, this has been delayed.</p> <p>Data are not available for most of the focal populations, but NYC data disaggregated by race/ethnicity (i.e., Black, Hispanic, White) show the gap in graduation rate between these groups has decreased over time.<sup>15</sup> Disaggregated data for LA show that students in foster care who are two or more races or Black graduated at a lower rate than students in foster care who are Hispanic or Latino or White in 2021-2022.<sup>16</sup></p>

<sup>11</sup> For all these measures, differences between groups and over time have not undergone significance testing.

<sup>12</sup> Among students who entered high school five years prior to the specified school year who graduated within five years (e.g., students who entered high school in 2016-2017 who graduated by 2020-2021). The five-year cohort graduation rate includes regular high school graduates and non-graduate completers, which includes Adult Education High School Diploma Completers, CA High School Diploma Completers, CA High School Proficiency Exam Completers, GED Completers, and Special Education Certificate of Completion. Students who were in foster care at any point during their first four years of high school are included. Source: California Department of Education DataQuest. (n.d.) 2017-2018 through 2021-2022 Five-Year Cohort Outcomes: Los Angeles County Report. <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/page2.asp?level=County&subject=Coh5&submit1=Submit>.

<sup>13</sup> California Department of Education published the 2021-2022 school year data after we completed our qualitative data collection activities. We include this data for reference and will discuss with grantees, stakeholders, and Advisory Board members in 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Among students who entered high school five years prior to the specified school year who graduated within five years (e.g., students who entered high school in 2014-2015 who graduated by 2018-2019). Five-year cohort graduation rate includes GEDs, Local Diplomas, and Regents Diplomas. Students who were in foster care for seven or more days during their high school years were included in the analysis. Source: New York City Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence provided to Child Trends.

<sup>15</sup> Data for Asian youth are not specified as this subgroup included fewer than 30 foster youth. Source: New York City Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence and New York State Department of Education provided to Child Trends.

<sup>16</sup> Data for American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Filipino, and Pacific Islander youth are not specified as these subgroups included fewer than 30 foster youth. Source: California Department of Education DataQuest. (n.d.) 2021-2022 Five-Year Cohort Outcomes: Los Angeles County Report. <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/page2.asp?level=County&subject=Coh5&submit1=Submit>.

Goal	Status
<p>65 percent decrease in the gap in high school graduation rates between foster and non-foster youth<sup>17</sup></p>	<p>The gap in graduation rates between students in foster care and all students in LA increased 25 percent between the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years.<sup>18</sup></p> <p>30 percent of NYC youth in foster care graduated high school within five years, compared to 81 percent of all students in the 2018-2019 school year.<sup>19</sup> The percent change in the gap in high school graduation rates between foster youth and all youth will be calculated once updated data for school years 2020, 2021, and 2022 are available through <a href="#">CIDI</a>.</p>
<p>55 percent of transition-age foster youth high school graduates and 40 percent of focal subgroups are enrolled in post-secondary pathways within a year</p>	<p>In LA, 47 percent of young people in foster care who graduated in 2019-2020 were enrolled in a postsecondary pathway within <u>16 months</u> of graduation,<sup>20</sup> a decrease from 53 percent of 2018-2019 graduates.<sup>21, 22</sup> When disaggregated by race/ethnicity, of 2019-2020 graduates, Black and White foster youth had a 16-month postsecondary enrollment rate of 49 percent, and Hispanic or Latino foster youth had a rate of 46 percent.<sup>23</sup></p> <p>In NYC, the best available postsecondary enrollment data reflect the percentage of young people who are enrolled in college or vocational/trade school upon aging out of care. Seventeen percent of NYC foster youth who aged out of care in 2021 were enrolled in postsecondary pathways.<sup>24</sup></p>

<sup>17</sup> Comparisons presented here are between students in foster care and all students (which includes students in foster care) based on data availability.

<sup>18</sup> Among students who entered high school five years prior to the specified school year who graduated within five years (e.g., students who entered high school in 2016-2017 who graduated by 2020-2021). The five-year cohort graduation rate includes regular high school graduates and non-graduate completers, which includes Adult Education High School Diploma Completers, CA High School Diploma Completers, CA High School Proficiency Exam Completers, GED Completers, Special Education Certificate of Completion. Students who were in foster care at any point during their first four years of high school are included. Source: California Department of Education DataQuest. (n.d.) 2020-2021 through 2021-2022 Five-Year Cohort Outcomes: Los Angeles County Report. <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/page2.asp?level=County&subject=Coh5&submit1=Submit>.

<sup>19</sup> Among students who entered high school five years prior to the specified school year who graduated within five years (e.g., students who entered high school in 2014-2015 who graduated by 2018-2019). Five-year cohort graduation rate includes GEDs, Local Diplomas, and Regents Diplomas. Students who were in foster care for seven or more days during their high school years were included in the analysis. Source: New York City Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence provided to Child Trends (students in foster care) and New York City Department of Education. <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/academics/graduation-results> (all students).

<sup>20</sup> Based on input from grantees and public agency partners in LA, we report on enrollment in postsecondary pathways within 16 months of high school graduation to allow more transition time.

<sup>21</sup> Postsecondary education includes any public or private postsecondary institution (in- or out-of-state) in the United States. Source: California Department of Education DataQuest. (n.d.) 2018-2019 & 2019-2020 College-Going Rate for California High School Students: Los Angeles County Report. <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/page2.asp?level=County&subject=CGR&submit1=Submit>

<sup>22</sup> California Department of Education published the 2019-2020 data after we completed our qualitative data collection activities. We include this data for reference and will discuss with grantees, stakeholders, and Advisory Board members in 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Data for American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Filipino, and Pacific Islander youth are not specified as these subgroups included fewer than 30 foster youth. Source: California Department of Education DataQuest. (n.d.) 2019-2020 College-Going Rate for California High School Students: Los Angeles County Report. <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/page2.asp?level=County&subject=CGR&submit1=Submit>

<sup>24</sup> Among other data sources, this report uses Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA) data which are youth- or caseworker-reported and not verified with more complete administrative data. This data should be interpreted with caution. Source: New York City

Goal	Status
	<p>Disaggregated by race/ethnicity, these data show 18 percent of Black foster youth and 12 percent of Latinx foster youth were enrolled in postsecondary pathways upon aging out of care in 2021.<sup>25</sup></p> <p>Available data for the other focal populations are unavailable.</p>
<p>75 percent of transition-age foster youth ages 14-17 are in family-based placements</p>	<p>In 2021, 78 percent of transition-age foster youth in LA were in family-based placements.<sup>26</sup></p> <p>75 percent of transition-age foster youth in NYC were in family-based placements in 2021.<sup>27</sup></p>
<p>Five other major U.S. jurisdictions are replicating Initiative-tested approaches</p>	<p>Three Initiative-tested approaches have been expanded to new jurisdictions. These include the replication of <b>Fair Futures</b> in Buffalo, NY; LA's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Waiver's permanent statewide expansion, due in part, to work between the <b>Opportunity Youth Collaborative</b> and the California Opportunity Youth Network; and <b>Fostering Media Connections</b>' expansion of its reporting to additional jurisdictions, including the hiring of a reporter covering national child welfare research- and policy-related stories.</p>

## Key findings and recommendations

We provide detailed analyses of the progress, barriers, and recommendations made by grantees, stakeholders, caregivers, and Advisory Board members for each sub-strategy and jurisdiction in the sub-strategy snapshots linked here:

- [Education and Career Pathways](#)
  - [Education](#)
  - [Postsecondary](#)
  - [Career Development](#)
- [Safe and Stable Housing](#)

Administration for Children's Services. Report on Youth in Foster Care. (2021). <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2021/ReportOnYouthInFC2021.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Data for Latinx youth enrolled in vocational/trade school upon exit from care are not included in this calculation, as the data are suppressed due to small sample size. Data for Asian and White youth and youth whose race/ethnicity was reported as Other or Unknown are not specified as these subgroups included fewer than 30 foster youth. Source: New York City Administration for Children's Services. Report on Youth in Foster Care. (2021). <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2021/ReportOnYouthInFC2021.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Among foster youth ages 14-17 in care on July 1, 2021. Family-based placements include pre-adoptive, relative/non-relative extended family members (NREFM), foster, foster family agencies, guardian-dependent, guardian-independent, and trial home visit. Supervised Independent Living Placements (SILPs) are not counted here, although some foster youth in SILPs are also living in family settings. Source: CCWIP Reports. CWS/CMS 2021 Quarter 3 Extract. Data obtained from the University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project and provided to Child Trends by DCFS on 04/11/22.

<sup>27</sup> Among foster youth ages 14-17 in care on July 1, 2021. Family-based placements include foster homes or kinship placements and excludes youth whose entry reason is juvenile delinquency, youth in care for fewer than eight days, and youth in specialized placements. Source: New York State's CCRS database as of 3/2/2022. New York State's CNX database as of 3/25/2022 and 3/28/2022. Provided by New York City Administration for Children's Services.

- [Reproductive Health and Parenting Supports](#)
- [High Quality Mental Health Services](#)
- [Caregiver Recruitment, Retention, Training, and Support](#)

Across the sub-strategies, six key findings emerged. Within each key finding, we elevate relevant recommendations offered by grantees, stakeholders, caregivers, Advisory Board members, and Child Trends' evaluation team that may help the Initiative forward its work.

## The Initiative's grantees and partners have made important strides toward improving the lives of foster youth. As the Initiative expands its national advocacy, elevating local successes can have wide-reaching national impact.

Public investments in both LA and NYC, many championed by grantees, are expanding access to needed services and supports, including:

- \$30.7 million invested annually in [Fair Futures](#) in NYC, an ongoing commitment to young people's educational and career success driven by the advocacy efforts of Fair Futures' Youth Advisory Board. This increased funding is set as the baseline for future years in the city budget and allows the program to expand services provided to young people through age 26.<sup>28</sup>
- \$68 million invested in supporting foster youths' success in postsecondary education in California at community colleges, California State University, and the University of California.<sup>29</sup> SB 512, co-sponsored by [John Burton Advocates for Youth \(JBAY\)](#) and signed into law in 2021, expanded eligibility criteria to serve more students with foster care experience through the community colleges' NextUp campus-based support programs.<sup>30</sup>
- \$10 million invested by NYC in ACS' College Choice program, which provides financial (including college tuition, daily stipends for living expenses, and housing if not covered by a student's financial aid package) and programmatic supports (including tutoring and career counseling from [NY Foundling](#) and [Fair Futures](#)) for students in foster care to attend the college of their choice.<sup>31</sup>
- An increase in annual state funding in California for transitional housing from \$8 million to \$33.3 million through SB 187, co-sponsored by [JBAY](#). This legislation also expanded eligibility for the Transitional Housing Program Plus (THP-Plus). Young people can now access THP-Plus through age 24 and for a maximum of 36 months.<sup>32</sup> Among other state investments, THP Non-Minor Dependent (THP-NMD) providers in LA began receiving a higher rate for expectant and parenting youth in September 2022.

The Initiative has partnered with service providers and public agencies to fill identified service gaps, such as:

- Ensuring youth in LA did not age out of foster care into homelessness in December 2021 when extended care options provided due to the COVID-19 pandemic expired. [Safe Place for Youth's](#) Pod

<sup>28</sup> The Center for Fair Futures (n.d.). A case study: The NYC Fair Futures story. <https://www.fairfuturesny.org/about/case-study>.

<sup>29</sup> JBAY (2022). 2022 implementation fact sheet: Foster youth college support. <https://jbay.org/resources/2022-implementation-fact-sheet-fy-campus-support/>.

<sup>30</sup> JBAY (2021). SB 512 fact sheet. <https://jbay.org/resources/sb-512-fact-sheet/>.

<sup>31</sup> NYC Office of the Mayor (2022). Mayor Adams, Administration for Children's Services announce "College Choice" program to help cover cost of college expenses for hundreds of students in foster care. <https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/719-22/mayor-adams-administration-children-s-services-college-choice-program-help-cover>. Hunt, M. (2022). New York City pledges new investment in foster youth college expenses. <https://imprintnews.org/top-stories/new-york-city-invests-in-foster-youth-college-expenses/234033>.

<sup>32</sup> JBAY (2022). 2022 implementation fact sheet: Expansion of transitional housing for former foster youth. <https://jbay.org/resources/2022-fact-sheet-thp-thplusplus/>.

Share program continues to provide housing support to young people without an identified housing plan.

- Increasing access to trauma-focused mental health treatments (e.g., Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)) in NYC through public and private investments to train mental health professionals through the [Department of Health and Mental Hygiene](#). The need for increased access to alternative modalities such as EMDR for youth in care was emphasized by grantees and Advisory Board members.

**Grantees continue to build the infrastructure in LA and NYC to make data-driven decisions to improve outcomes for young people.**

- [California Child Welfare Indicators Project](#) at the University of California, Berkeley launched the [Transition-Age Youth Research and Evaluation Hub \(TAY-Hub\)](#). The TAY-Hub builds on the legacy of the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (previously funded by the Initiative) by creating a platform for ongoing reporting of cross-systems data on the experiences and outcomes of young people. Researchers at the TAY-Hub will partner with young people for their insights on research and evaluation findings.
- Data on high school graduation outcomes in NYC produced by the [Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence \(CIDI\)](#) has been cited in several media publications. Grantees identified opportunities to spread awareness of the protective and risk factors identified in [CIDI's](#) report to promote systemic changes to support more young people in care to graduate from high school.
- Grantees are evaluating their approaches to better understand their impact and support efforts to scale effective programs. For example, [Friends of the Children](#) is conducting a randomized controlled trial of its mentoring program that matches parenting youth in care and their children with a professional, paid mentor.

**Policy and systems changes spurred by grantees at the city- and state-levels have the potential to serve as national models.**

- California removed the requirement of a diagnosis to receive specialty mental health services through Medi-Cal as part of its Medicaid transformation (California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal “CalAIM” initiative). Sharing the roadmap used by California to garner support for this change may inform other states' efforts around Medicaid reform.
- LA's waiver that allows foster youth to participate in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program while they are still in school underwent a permanent statewide expansion in 2021 due to [Opportunity Youth Collaborative's \(OYC\)](#) work with the LA Performance Partnership Pilot and the California Opportunity Youth Network. Other states and communities may benefit from learning how the WIOA waiver process has worked in California as they seek to expand workforce opportunities for youth in care.
- ACS' preparation to implement new performance-based foster care contracts draws on lessons learned from the Initiative's earlier investments in [Home Away from Home](#), which identified and embedded caregiver recruitment and retention strategies in participating provider agencies. Once implemented, all foster parents will be trained as Enhanced Family Foster Care caregivers to better meet the needs of children and youth in care and promote placement stability. Most communities and states are struggling to recruit and retain caregivers for youth and can learn from the successes and challenges to implementing this approach.

- Following years of advocacy by grantees such as [Advocates for Children](#), the NYC Department of Education created a central office focused on supporting the needs of students in foster care. ACS has also released its school stability policy, informed by [Advocates for Children](#) and the [American Bar Association](#). Other states and communities can learn from this approach as they implement their own efforts to improve educational outcomes for youth in care.

### Recommendations for the Foundation:

- Support ongoing success by ensuring full implementation of new policies and building knowledge of what works and opportunities for sustainability and expansion through evaluation.
- Elevate local strategies and learnings about their effectiveness (e.g., the removal of the diagnostic requirements for mental health services and the WIOA Waiver in CA) to inform policy solutions at the national level. Mental health in particular emerged as a key area of interest among national advocates.

## Ongoing challenges persist in strengthening the systems and programs serving young people and the data available to monitor progress.

**Existing policies still do not achieve their intended aims.** For example, grantees are working to ensure that the local education agencies (LEAs) implement California’s Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)<sup>33</sup> in a way that explicitly supports students in foster care, one of the subgroups the LCFF was targeted to help. While LCFF funding has increased, LEAs are not required to spend the funds on students in foster care. [Children Now](#) found that only 11 percent of the LEA plans for LCFF described services specific to students in foster care and the LEA’s intention to invest LCFF funding into those supports.<sup>34</sup> Advocates would like to see reforms to LCFF that increase resources and accountability for LEAs serving students in foster care.

Additionally, while early evidence indicates that the Family Urgent Response System (FURS)– a statewide trauma-informed crisis response system launched in California in 2021 – has helped support placement stability,<sup>35</sup> grantees pointed to the need for more awareness of this new resource. Additionally, one caregiver in LA described that while they were provided referrals through FURS, they did not feel as though the underlying issues their family experienced were addressed.

**Grantees, public agency partners, caregivers, and young people identified several sub-strategies in which additional services would benefit young people.** Notable gaps included:

- **Vocational training and opportunities to pursue entrepreneurship**, as much of the focus in both jurisdictions remains on supporting young people to pursue postsecondary education. Advisory Board members emphasized that college is not the best path for all young people.
- **Nontraditional mental health services** that are effective at treating trauma and are responsive to the increased mental health needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>33</sup> For more information on LCFF, see Children Now (n.d.). *Local Control Funding Formula: School funding & equity*. <https://www.childrennow.org/education/lcff/>.

<sup>34</sup> Children Now (2021). *2021 Child welfare policy year in review*. Email correspondence.

<sup>35</sup> Data presented by DCFS at the January 2022 LA County Commission on Children and Families meeting indicates that among the calls received by the FURS hotline for LA families from March 2021 through January 2022, 90 percent of young people remained in their homes/placements. Email correspondence.

- **Affordable housing** is a systemic challenge that must be addressed in both jurisdictions for young people to utilize available resources such as vouchers.
- **Intentional placement matching** that ensures young people are placed with caregivers who are well-suited to care for each young person, rather than placing based on availability. Grantees and subgrantees such as [Extraordinary Families](#) and [FosteringUNITY](#) have developed internal placement matching processes that could serve as models.

**Consistent with prior years, there continue to be major obstacles in having cross-system data to inform policy and practice.** Grantees described examples of duplicative data entry across multiple data systems in NYC. Grantees and stakeholders also described persistent challenges in sharing data between DCFS and schools in LA, including delayed and inaccurate information sharing regarding placement moves. Caregivers perceived youth-serving systems such as education, child welfare, and mental health to be siloed and uncoordinated in how they share information across systems and deliver services. Advisory Board members agreed with the need for improved cross-system coordination but cautioned that this coordination should always involve young people themselves, as it is often sensitive or personal information being shared.

Several data gaps were also identified, including:

- **Data on the housing experiences of young people after they exit care.** A related study by the [California Policy Lab](#) is underway but has encountered challenges related to data availability and quality.
- **Qualitative data on the mental health needs and service experiences of young people** as a supplement to the current mental health indicators which have significant limitations in what they can tell us about the mental health of young people (e.g., the indicator for LA reports the number of referrals made for mental health services without further information on young people’s need for or receipt of those services). Advisory Board members recommended that qualitative research examining young people’s experiences with mental health services is needed (e.g., experience with waiting lists, whether/how their needs were being met, and experiences with provider turnover).
- **Data that illuminates the experiences and outcomes of expectant/parenting youth, LGBTQ+ youth, and youth who have been victims of exploitation are extremely limited.** Surveys and qualitative data collection may be strategies to supplement the lack of administrative data.

### **Recommendations for the Foundation:**

- Consider opportunities to address the identified gaps (e.g., nontraditional mental health services, vocational/entrepreneurial pathways) when making future grants.
- Explore opportunities to fund coordinated responses to these issues, as many will require engagement of cross-systems partners. Grantees and public agency partners value the Initiative’s ability to bring partners together in collective impact work.
- Fund partners to fill information gaps (e.g., qualitative data on mental health, data on housing outcomes after young people exit care, data on the focal populations).

## The COVID-19 pandemic has had continued and wide-reaching negative impacts on young people’s lives and the systems that serve them. It has also prompted innovation and collaboration that should be sustained.

The Initiative, its grantees, and public agency partners sprang into action to meet the immediate acute needs of young people during the early stages of the pandemic, with multiple examples illustrated in the *Foster Youth Strategic Initiative 2020 Evaluation Report*.<sup>36</sup> **As the pandemic has continued, so have many of the challenges identified in 2020.**

- **Mental health and education emerged repeatedly as interconnected areas of concern.** Grantees in both LA and NYC described concerns about the impact of lost instructional time on high school students in foster care, decreases in postsecondary enrollment and persistence, and a sense that the challenges young people have faced are not fully borne out in the data, especially now that flexibilities around graduation requirements have ended. Advisory Board members described the transition to postsecondary education as particularly challenging during the pandemic, due to challenges with remote learning and specifically a sense that students were not as well prepared for this transition due to remote learning. Mental health has directly and indirectly impacted young people’s educational experiences, with grantees describing the ways in which the pandemic increased isolation, exacerbated pre-existing mental health needs for some young people, and presented barriers to accessing services (e.g., mental health services previously provided through schools). A youth-led report published by the **Reproductive Health Equity Project (RHEP)** in California included recommendations to prioritize mental health resources.<sup>37</sup>
- **Concerns about kin and non-kin caregivers’ wellbeing have also emerged during the pandemic.** While many grantees have provided increased supports to caregivers, particularly during the early stages of the pandemic, grantees in both LA and NYC identified the ongoing effects of social isolation, job loss, and the increased demands on caregivers as having lasting effects on caregivers’ emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. Combined with the increased needs of young people and a lack of needed services, these stressors have posed challenges to caregiver recruitment and retention. In a survey of California’s county child welfare agencies, three-quarters of agency staff respondents identified a moderate to severe impact of the pandemic on caregiver recruitment.<sup>38</sup> Grantees also described caregivers who were discouraged by the lack of resources and are therefore hesitant to accept a new placement after one ends.
- Similar to trends nationwide, the pandemic’s impacts have not been felt equally across all foster youth and caregivers. **Grantees and stakeholders identified disproportionate impacts on several of the Initiative’s focal populations, as well as other subpopulations of youth in care.** The pandemic brought to the forefront and further exacerbated long-standing, systemic barriers to resources for under-supported communities, including youth of color and LGBTQ+ youth. More specifically, grantees described the pandemic as having a particularly negative impact on Black and Latinx young people’s academic progress, LGBTQ+ and transgender young people’s access to supportive programming, and Black youths’ access to mental health services. They also noted the heightened financial pressures and experiences of violence faced by young people who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Grantees also lifted up youth with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) as another subpopulation

<sup>36</sup> McKlinton et al. (2021). *Foster Youth Strategic Initiative 2020 evaluation report*. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/foster-youth-strategic-initiative-2020-evaluation-report>.

<sup>37</sup> Foster Youth-Led Intersections Working Group (August 2021). *Telling our own stories: Former foster youth experiences with barriers and healing during COVID-19*, available at <https://fosterreprohealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Telling-Our-Own-Stories.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> Boyer, D. (March 2022). *Impact of COVID on county child welfare systems*. Presentation at the Child Welfare Policy Roundtable. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/csm1ecj0ax981a3/b.%20CWDA%20-%20Pandemic%20Impact%20on%20CWS%20agencies.pdf?dl=0>.

of youth in care who faced significant educational barriers and inconsistent access to services during remote learning, with continued impacts on their educational progress.

- **Youth-serving systems have faced intensified workforce challenges, as teachers, mental health professionals, and others suffered burnout and sought new opportunities.** Grantees such as **NY Foundling** and **Children’s Village** provided training to support the mental wellbeing of youth-serving professionals, recognizing the collective experience of trauma.

**In response to these and other challenges, grantees and public agency partners created innovative responses that many hope to see continue.**

- **Virtual delivery of healthcare, career development training (developed in partnership between Youth@Work and OYC in LA), and training for youth-serving professionals helped increase accessibility of services for many young people,** particularly in LA where transportation can be a barrier. However, grantees and stakeholders were quick to acknowledge that technology and privacy barriers remain for some young people (e.g., a survey of young people by the **RHEP** found that young people in congregate care settings had limited options to confidentially and privately access telehealth and other remote services), and these challenges must be addressed for equitable access to virtual resources.
- **Grantees also reflected that access to financial resources (e.g., unemployment benefits, pandemic relief funds, and emergency funding provided through the Initiative) allowed young people time to consider their career goals and next steps** and an opportunity to support their mental wellbeing without being focused on finding entry-level employment to meet their basic needs. Related, Advisory Board members stressed the financial barriers faced by foster youth as they transition to adulthood and the ways in which a guaranteed source of basic income would alleviate the pressures they and their peers face in providing for themselves while also planning for long-term goals.
- **Public agencies described new cross-systems collaborations that emerged to serve young people more nimbly.** For example, multiple public agencies include DCFS, LA Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), Department of Public Services (DPSS), and Department of Mental Health (DMH) worked in close partnership to support young people facing an end to their housing in December 2021 when extended care options expired.

#### **Recommendations for the Foundation:**

- Promote continued collaborative responses to address ongoing challenges related to the pandemic, particularly as they relate to youth mental health; education, including the transition to postsecondary education; and caregiver burnout.
- Sustain innovations that have increased access to supports (e.g., telehealth) while ensuring equitable access to the technology needed for participation.

**While grantees and public agency partners increasingly point to the importance and value of youth voice in their work, gaps remain in authentically engaging young people as partners in decision-making.**

Youth voice is a central element of the Initiative’s strategy, and many of the Foundation’s grantees and partners engage young people through a variety of mechanisms. Grantee-led efforts include the following:

- **Fair Futures'** advocacy efforts in NYC have been fully youth-led through a Youth Advisory Board chaired by a Youth Coordinator with lived experience. The Youth Advisory Board regularly attends City Council meetings, coordinates with ACS, and leads other events. Their advocacy has been very successful—and helped lead to **Fair Future's** funding increasing to \$30.7 million.<sup>39</sup> The Youth Advisory Board has identified housing as its next advocacy priority.
- **RHEP's** Youth Advisory Board is comprised of current and former foster youth in California who are focused on increasing access to reproductive and sexual health services and education for youth in care and advancing their rights. The Youth Advisory Board is engaged in multiple activities to provide input to RHEP, public agency partners, and youth-serving organizations. Youth Advisory Board members have hosted webinars for their peers and developed briefs for decision-makers on topics such as intersectionality and access to care.
- **OYC's** Young Leaders are engaged in advocacy efforts across a variety of topics in LA through a supportive leadership development program. Recommendations from OYC have also resulted in increased youth engagement by public agencies, with all Youth@Work Centers now required to develop a youth advisory board.

**Beyond advisory board approaches, grantees engage young people in a variety of ways, such as:** delivering peer support (e.g., peer educators at **Mt. Sinai Hospital** in NYC); participating in hiring processes for youth-serving staff (e.g., **JCCA** in NYC); serving on the grantee's board of directors (e.g., two alumni of **City Living NY's** services sit on the organization's board); incorporating youth feedback into program development (e.g., **HeartShare St. Vincent's Services** created a homeownership workshop for program alumni in NYC based on youth input); engaging individuals with lived experience in external steering committees (e.g., **Alliance for Children's Rights** recruited youth and caregivers to participate in monthly steering committee discussions on the implementation of FURS); and providing training opportunities to prepare young people for engaging in policy and practice improvements (e.g., a training program being established by **Good Shepherd Services** in NYC).

**Public agencies have also continued to refine their mechanisms for youth engagement.** The LA County Board of Supervisors established a Youth Commission in 2020 composed of young people with lived experience in child welfare and juvenile justice to elevate youth perspectives, concerns, feedback, and recommendations.<sup>40</sup> The LA Youth Commission has evaluated county departments, hosted listening sessions, and finalized its strategic plan with three policy priorities identified: housing, universal basic income, and juvenile justice. In NYC, ACS' Youth Leadership Council meets monthly and provides feedback on policies, surveys, and ACS initiatives.<sup>41</sup> The LGBTQAI+ youth subcommittee of the ACS Youth Leadership Council also meets monthly and is co-designing a targeted recruitment strategy for LGBTQAI+ caregivers alongside ACS'

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"This finding is important because oftentimes youth are asked to articulate their lived experience without any clear role in the decision-making process. I think it's important that we understand how difficult it is for youth to tap into those memories and traumas and articulate them in a way for others to understand. Simply put, they are the professionals in each area of their lived experience, and they deserve to not only be seen as such but also compensated as such. It is important that we bridge the gap and see lived experience as any person would see a degree. We lived it, and we endured it, and because of it many of us struggle with the traumas inflicted by the lived experience that people expect us to share openly and for free, and this is not okay. I hope you understand the need for increased funding in this area and realize that those of us with lived experience are the professionals in those collective worlds."

- Daniel Bisuano, Evaluation Advisory Board Member

<sup>39</sup> The Center for Fair Futures (n.d.). A case study: The NYC Fair Futures story. <https://www.fairfuturesny.org/about/case-study>.

<sup>40</sup> For more information, see: <https://youthcommission.lacounty.gov/>

<sup>41</sup> For more information, see: <https://www.nyc.gov/site/acs/youth/youthleadershipcouncil.page>

Department of Equity Strategies' LGBTQ Unit staff. Public agencies are also soliciting youth input through mechanisms such as listening sessions and surveys.

**While grantees and public agencies point to the value of youth engagement, opportunities arose across each of the Initiative's sub-strategies to strengthen authentic engagement** in improving systems and programs. Grantees and stakeholders emphasized that the child welfare field must do a better job of:

- Inviting youth to more decision-making tables, empowering them to have meaningful roles, and creating spaces where youth feel comfortable sharing their perspectives.
- Avoiding the tokenization of young people.
- Acting on the recommendations made by young people who may disengage if their perspectives are not heard and implemented.
- Providing fair compensation for young people's time and expertise.
- Scheduling stakeholder meetings at times that are conducive to youth participation (e.g., around school time and other commitments).
- Intentionally engaging young people whose voices are less frequently heard (e.g., youth experiencing homelessness and youth in residential facilities) and ensuring representation of youth with a variety of identities and experiences.
- Moving toward opportunities that allow young people to co-design, rather than just provide input on, policy and practice interventions.
- In addition, grantees and stakeholders identified gaps in engaging young people in individual case planning decisions. This could be addressed by creating meaningful opportunities for young people to participate in decisions that affect their lives, such as placement decisions and desired services.

### **Recommendations for the Foundation:**

- Consider increased funding and learning opportunities to support grantees and public agency partners to meaningfully engage youth as authentic partners. The Fair Futures Advisory Board and LA Youth Commissioners have identified housing as a priority, which may be an opportunity to promote cross-jurisdiction learning among young people and the adults who work with them.
- Engage individuals with lived experience in the Initiative's strategy development and implementation.

**With its specified focus on youth of color, expectant/parenting youth, LGBTQ+ youth, and youth who have been victims of commercial sexual exploitation, the Initiative is committed to promoting more equitable outcomes, but significant work remains in reforming the systems responsible for inequitable outcomes.**

Examples of the investments made to-date to improve outcomes for the Initiative's focal populations include:

- **Friends of the Children's** Fostering Resiliency Project matches Black boys aged 12-18 in LA with a mentor to help them succeed in and graduate high school. The program is also expanding to include a team member focused on supporting young people's caregivers through skills building, resource referral, and crisis intervention to promote placement stability.
- **Saving Innocence** is LA's only licensed resource family approval (RFA) provider focused on recruiting and training families specifically for youth who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation. In addition to a range of case management, therapeutic, and other supports for young people, Saving Innocence trains caregivers on the unique needs and behaviors of youth who have been victims of exploitation through support groups, trainings, and a psychoeducational and support program.
- **SCO Family of Services'** Passages to Adulthood program provides holistic supports primarily to Black and Latinx current and former foster youth in NYC, with a focus on mental health, relationships, life skills development, and adult/peer mentorship. A key component of this program is providing culturally-responsive, healing-centered mental health care that aims to heal relational trauma.
- **JCCA** has expanded its **Fair Futures** programming to include a focus on Black and Latinx youth and youth who identify as LGBTQ+. JCCA also expanded its Leadership Enrichment and Advancement Equity Project to include equity training for young people with these identities to promote their wellbeing, self-understanding, and stability.
- **Mt. Sinai** has been funded by the Initiative to deliver mental health and reproductive health services to meet the unique needs of young people in all four of the focal populations in NYC.
- **Peace4Kids** strives to strengthen stability and community connections for youth in care in LA by matching them with mentors, serving young people in all four focal populations. Organizational leadership and staff have identities and lived experiences that mirror those of the young people served.

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"This is important because youth who are a part of the LGBTQ+ community have a high suicide rate due to getting bullied by their peers or people in their environment who just do not understand their situation. This is compounded by the fact that these youth often face multiple forms of oppression, especially if they are a youth of color and have been a victim of sexual exploitation. However, youth of color, expectant/parenting youth, LGBTQ+ youth, and youth who have been victims of commercial sexual exploitation all face similar discriminations and experience barriers to achieving positive outcomes in life. Therefore, all of these groups are very vulnerable and need help navigating life and the obstacles that prohibit them from positive outcomes. To help these groups achieve more equitable outcomes and increase chances for successes in life, I and others can help by spreading awareness and creating safe spaces for these individuals to talk about their experiences so that they can have a place to open up about themselves without having the fear that they will be judged. I also think that by creating more awareness, we can help lessen the stigma surrounding these groups and help inform people so that there will be less hate in the world."

- Evaluation Advisory Board Member

Notably, most of these investments provide programmatic supports for one or more focal populations. While some systems-related efforts are underway (e.g., policy advocacy by **JBAY** to address the

disproportionate effects of satisfactory academic progress policies<sup>42</sup> in postsecondary education on Black students), **addressing the needs of the Initiative's focal populations is an area for increased investment in systems-level reform efforts, as inequitable systems are responsible for producing inequitable outcomes.** Grantees cautioned that the focus on youth-level outcomes places the onus on young people, rather than the systems themselves. While several examples emerged of ways in which public agencies have sought to address these inequities (e.g., ACS has focused on recruiting kinship caregivers for Black youth in care; DCFS' Office of Equity leaders are working to improve the comprehensiveness of data identifying LGBTQ+ youth; removal of police officers from some schools in LA; and increased efforts to recruit and train caregivers for youth in the focal populations in LA and NYC), grantees and stakeholders acknowledge the significant work that remains. Structural and societal barriers that emerged across sub-strategies included:

- Disparate involvement with and outcomes within the child welfare system and criminal legal system, and greater disenfranchisement in the education system among youth of color, and Black youth in particular.
- Discrimination against youth with marginalized identities in areas such as employment (e.g., youth of color, youth who have been victims of exploitation) and housing (e.g., youth of color and Black youth in particular, parenting youth, youth who have been victims of exploitation).
- Lack of culturally-representative mentors, social workers, and mental health professionals, and lack of support for staff with identities that mirror those of the young people served and who may experience vicarious trauma.
- Lack of gender- and identity-affirming physical and mental health care and other supportive services specifically designed for LGBTQ+ youth, and transgender youth in particular.
- Fear of being reported to and monitored by the child welfare system limits parenting young people's access to available services (e.g., health care, childcare, housing, educational supports).
- Limited availability of affirming caregivers and family-based placements, particularly for LGBTQ+ youth and youth who have been victims of exploitation, and a lack of adequate training and supports available to their caregivers.

**Data-driven decision-making to improve the outcomes of young people across the focal populations is severely limited by the lack of disaggregated data.** None of the indicators tracked by the Initiative can be disaggregated for expectant/parenting youth, LGBTQ+ youth, or youth who have been victims of exploitation. Several, but not all, indicators can be reported by race/ethnicity. It's important to note that youth may be reluctant to disclose aspects of their identity due to concerns about discrimination and varying comfort levels with the professionals in their lives. It will therefore be important to explore other avenues for building an understanding of the strengths, needs, experiences, and outcomes of young people through qualitative and youth-driven data collection.

**Grantees and stakeholders repeatedly underscored the importance of considering intersectionality, recognizing that many young people have multiple marginalized identities.** Youth with multiple marginalized identities face bias and trauma from the oppression they experience across identities and are often disparately impacted by harmful outcomes. For example, a young parent seeking to obtain housing through a voucher may experience even greater bias if they are a person of color and LGBTQ+. Holding multiple, intersecting identities can result in unique experiences and needs, and more knowledge-building and services designed to be responsive to all aspects of a young person's identity are needed. Data are even more limited for youth with intersecting marginalized identities, particularly at the program level, as programs may focus on one identity in their reporting to be able to track outcomes over time.

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<sup>42</sup> Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policies determine whether students are eligible to maintain their financial aid based on Grade Point Average (GPA) and course completion rates. For more information, see JBAY (2021). *The overlooked obstacle: How Satisfactory Academic Progress Policies impede student success and equity.* <https://jbay.org/resources/overlooked-obstacle/>.

Finally, the Foundation has identified plans for 2023 to propel its internal equity work forward, including revisiting the Initiative's internal equity plan and identifying opportunities to strengthen implementation of this plan.

### Recommendations for the Foundation:

- Invest in systems reform that addresses historic and ongoing racism and other forms of oppression in youth- and family-serving systems. Investments to-date to support youth in the focal populations have focused more on programmatic supports for young people than systems-level changes.
- Invest in collecting data on the focal populations, including qualitative data.
- Seek opportunities to better understand (e.g., through qualitative data collection and youth engagement efforts), communicate, and respond to the experiences of youth with multiple marginalized identities.
- Engage in planned activities to continue to prioritize equity across the Initiative (i.e., updating the Initiative's internal equity plan as needed and identifying opportunities to strengthen implementation of this plan).
- Learn more about existing strengths and gaps across grantees. For example, encourage grantees to specifically describe how their grants will advance equity will help the Initiative understand how their investments connect to equity efforts.
- Inform future grantmaking through more engagement with community-based organizations led by and serving the Initiative's focal populations. Learn from philanthropic partners who have made their grantmaking more equitable by modifying application and reporting requirements to be more accessible for community-based organizations with limited administrative capacity.

**While the Initiative's Strategy25 is robust and addresses gaps previously identified by grantees and public agency partners (e.g., housing, mental health), two areas emerged for further consideration: prevention and developing/supporting the youth-serving workforce.**

Consistent with the Initiative's learning agenda for 2023, **grantees and stakeholders frequently pointed to the importance of prevention (both of maltreatment and entry into foster care, as well as earlier interventions to support wellbeing)**. Public agency leaders in LA and NYC expressed that prevention was their ultimate goal, and grantees highlighted the opportunity for philanthropy to expand their focus and lead efforts around prevention and supporting families to prevent the enduring effects of trauma associated with family separation and foster care. A focus on prevention also has the potential to produce more equitable outcomes by reducing the racial disparities that are present from first contact with the child welfare system and compounded at subsequent decision-making points, particularly for Black and Indigenous children and families.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2016). *Racial disproportionality and disparity in child welfare*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/racial\\_disproportionality.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/racial_disproportionality.pdf).

Several grantees (e.g., [Children Now](#), [Alliance for Children's Rights](#), and [Children's Village](#)) are closely involved in the implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)<sup>44</sup> and other prevention efforts at the state and national levels. For example, [Children Now](#) co-sponsored a budget proposal that was successful in providing funding to support counties' implementation of FFPSA and other prevention efforts, participated in state and county workgroups, and provided feedback to strengthen the state's FFPSA plan, among other activities. FFPSA may be one resource to leverage specifically for parenting youth. Two-generation approaches can help prevent system involvement for the children of parenting youth in care; however, just as data are needed to drive informed decision-making for the focal populations, more research is also needed on how to most effectively support young parents, including young parents who experience compounding difficulties (e.g., fewer financial resources, fewer supports).

In addition to preventing foster care entry, grantees and stakeholders described a desire to shift the focus of their efforts upstream for current foster youth. Examples included focusing on attendance, school discipline practices, connection to tutors/mentors, and academic performance to help promote positive educational outcomes; providing earlier access to individualized mental health services to supporting young people's wellbeing and placement stability; and creating more housing opportunities that do not require that a young person first experience homelessness.

**Finally, without the trained, skilled, and supported workforce needed to deliver the innovative solutions funded by the Initiative, grantees, stakeholders, and Advisory Board members anticipate that these efforts will fall short of their intended outcomes.** This theme emerged across the child welfare, education, and mental health systems, and grantees and stakeholders described high levels of burnout and acute challenges faced by youth-serving professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic. A noted gap was the need to hire, train, and support more mental health practitioners of color. Youth bear the impact of high turnover rates, with Advisory Board members describing the harmful impact of having to open up to multiple clinicians and service referrals that were never made during times of staff transitions.

### **Recommendations for the Foundation:**

- Explore these as areas for further investment, in close coordination with efforts already underway in each jurisdiction. Developing/supporting the youth-serving workforce may already fit within the scope of the relevant sub-strategies (e.g., education, mental health, caregivers).
- Coordinate with and learn from other funders with experience investing in these areas to ensure complementary efforts.

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<sup>44</sup> For more information on FFPSA, see: <https://familyfirstact.org/>.

# Appendix: Grantee List

Initiative grantees are categorized below based on their location and focus of their grant. Many grantees work across multiple areas of focus outside of their Initiative-funded projects.<sup>45</sup>

	Strategy <sup>46</sup>			
	1	2	3	4
<b>Los Angeles</b>				
Alliance for Children’s Rights	•	•		
A Sense of Home	•			
Aspen Institute, Inc.	•		•	
California Child Welfare Indicators Project (UC Berkeley School of Social Welfare)			•	•
California College Pathways (Greater Horizons)	•		•	
California Policy Lab (Regents of the University of California)	•		•	•
California Pre-College Collective (First Star, Inc.)	•			
CA Reproductive Health Equity Project (CA RHEP) (National Center for Youth Law)	•	•	•	•
Center for Strategic Partnerships (Southern California Grantmakers)	•			
Children Now	•	•		
Children’s Data Network (USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work)				•
Children’s Defense Fund - CA	•		•	
Children’s Law Center of California			•	
Coalition for Responsible Community Development	•			
Echo Training Center*				
Extraordinary Families	•	•		
First Place for Youth	•			
Friends of the Children – Los Angeles	•	•	•	
FosteringUNITY*		•		
John Burton Advocates for Youth	•	•	•	•
Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture	•			
National Center for Youth Law – Compassionate Systems and Collaborative Responses	•		•	
National Health Law Program, Inc.	•		•	
Peace4Kids	•	•		•
Planned Parenthood Pasadena and San Gabriel Valley, Inc.	•	•	•	•
Public Counsel	•	•	•	•
Safe Place for Youth	•			
Saving Innocence, Inc.	•	•	•	
UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools				•
United Friends of the Children	•	•		
United Ways of California*		•		

<sup>45</sup> This table lists the grantees engaged in our data collection this year. Beyond this list, the Initiative funded several additional partners. For a full list of the Foster Youth Initiative’s grantees, please see the Foundation’s [website](#).

<sup>46</sup> Strategy 1 is foster youth, Strategy 2 is caregivers, Strategy 3 is national field-building, and Strategy 4 is research and evaluation.

	Strategy <sup>46</sup>			
	1	2	3	4
<b>New York City</b>				
Action Research *		•		•
Administration for Children's Services (New Yorkers for Children)		•		•
Advocates for Children of New York, Inc.	•	•		
Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition of New York (AFFCNY)*		•		
American Bar Association Fund for Justice and Education	•	•	•	
Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (The Mayor's Fund for New York)				•
Children of Bellevue	•	•		•
Children's Aid Society	•	•	•	
Children's Defense Fund - NY			•	•
Children's Village, Inc.	•	•		
City Living NY	•			
Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (Fund for Public Health in New York)	•			•
Duke University			•	
Fair Futures (Community Foundation of New Jersey)	•	•		•
Foster Care Unplugged*	•			
Good Shepherd Services	•	•	•	
Graham-Windham	•	•		
Heartshare – St. Vincent's Services, Inc.	•			
Health Research Incorporated	•			
Jewish Child Care Association of New York (JCCA)	•			
Mount Sinai Hospital	•			
New York Foundling	•	•		
Techlink (New Yorkers for Children, Inc.)	•			
Research Foundation of the City University of New York	•		•	
SCO Family of Services	•	•	•	•
The Alex Project*				
The Door – A Center for Alternatives, Inc.	•		•	
<b>Los Angeles and New York City</b>				
First Star, Inc	•	•		
Friends of the Children – National Office – No Matter What Project	•		•	•
Power to Decide (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy)	•			
<b>National</b>				
Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)	•		•	•
Fostering Media Connections			•	•
FosterMore		•	•	
Partnership for America's Children			•	
The Seattle Foundation			•	
Think of Us			•	

\*Subgrantee included in data collection.