

# Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

## **Program Strategy for Foster Youth**

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## **Executive Summary**

*In August 2011, the board of directors of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation reaffirmed the importance of foster youth as a priority for Foundation grantmaking and requested that Foundation staff develop a strategy for achieving measurable impact in this area. This briefing outlines a strategy informed by substantial input from content experts and practitioners in the field. In February 2012 the board of directors approved the strategy for the next five years.*

**THE CHALLENGE: Children who spend time in the foster youth system in the United States face a troubling future, and those who age out of the system have even worse outcomes.** In 2010, the U.S. government assumed the responsibility for parenting over 400,000 children across the country. While the number of foster youth in the system has declined 22 percent since 2000, older youth age 16 to 20 represent an increasing percentage of the foster care population. While most youth exit foster care to a permanent home—most often through reunification with their biological parents or adoption—older youth are more likely to remain in care longer, and 30,000 youth per year age out of the foster care system at age 18 or 21.<sup>1</sup>

Youth often age out of the foster care system without a meaningful connection to an adult. They also have low educational attainment levels, little if any job experience, and no place to live. It is not surprising that as a consequence, one quarter spend time in jail, and over 50 percent spend time in a homeless shelter. From an educational perspective, foster youth are less likely to graduate high school than the general population, and while between 40 and 50 percent complete some postsecondary coursework, fewer than 11 percent obtain a degree. In addition, during the four years after leaving foster care, more than half of youth who transitioned out of the system had no earnings; those with earnings averaged an income of \$7,500 per year.

**ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE: Investment in critical skills and supports, accompanied by improved system coordination and alignment, can help improve outcomes for youth who transition out of care.**

Foster youth often lack critical skills and supports necessary to overcome the challenges they face when they leave care. Programs that will improve **transition-age youth** (TAY) college and career readiness and provide stronger caregivers for older foster youth will significantly contribute to improved self-sufficiency of TAY. In addition, special attention is warranted in working with two particularly vulnerable sub-populations who especially struggle upon transition out of foster care: 1) pregnant and parenting foster youth and 2) crossover youth who are involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Postponing pregnancies and supporting parenting teens, whose children often enter foster care themselves, will contribute to improved outcomes for these teen mothers and can reduce the number of foster youth in future generations. Improving outcomes for crossover youth presents an opportunity to reach a high-need group and reduce costs to society, as this population uses the greatest amount of government services of all former foster youth.

The well-being of youth in foster care also depends on the complex interaction of multiple systems and stakeholders. The foster care system and the courts are responsible for the child's placement and basic services, but other systems and stakeholders such as biological and foster families, the health system, and the department of education are also critical to a child's long-term well-being. However, these systems and stakeholders are often very disconnected and lack communication or coordination. Greater alignment and coordination are needed to improve youth outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> The age of emancipation differs by state; 18 states including New York and California have raised the emancipation age from 18 to 21.

Los Angeles County and New York City hold high potential for strategic philanthropy; both locations have large foster youth populations, supportive stakeholder communities, and positive policy environments. With 60,000 youth in foster care, California has the largest foster youth population. The state accounts for 15 percent of the nation’s youth aging out of care each year (5,000 youth), of which 1,600 to 2,000 youth live in Los Angeles County. New York State has the second largest population of foster youth in the country, with 28,000 youth in care. Approximately 1,500 youth age out of care each year in New York, two-thirds of which are in New York City. In both Los Angeles County and New York City, momentum for reform exists among key public sector and nonprofit leaders to improve outcomes for foster youth, and strong philanthropic funding partners are present. These two geographies present unique opportunities to improve outcomes for a large number of youth and set an example for improving TAY outcomes for the rest of the nation.

**THE HILTON FOUNDATION’S ROLE: The Hilton Foundation will work to impact the lives of thousands of children by supporting older foster youth transitioning out of care to achieve self-sufficiency and live healthy and productive lives.**

The Foundation seeks to work with public, nonprofit, and private sector partners to ensure that youth transitioning out of foster care in Los Angeles County and New York City are equipped with the range of tools, resources, and supports necessary to succeed living independently. In addition to grantmaking to nonprofit organizations, the Foundation will use other philanthropic tools such as convening, research, and advocacy to advance efforts to improve outcomes for foster youth.

**SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC APPROACH: Supporting high-risk foster youth, strengthening programs, and improving systemic coordination and alignment**

The Foundation’s strategy addresses the challenges foster youth face as they age out of the system through a two-tiered programmatic approach that addresses both specific high-risk youth in the population as well as programs that help all foster youth gain the skills and support they need to succeed. Programmatic support will be complemented by support for system alignment and coordination across all key organizations influencing outcomes for TAY, as well as development and dissemination of knowledge for both practitioners and policymakers across the field.

<b>vision</b>	<i>Youth transitioning out of foster care are on the path to success, able to live self-sufficiently and with the interpersonal connections they need to thrive</i>
<b>initiative areas</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase TAY self-sufficiency through improved college and career readiness, stronger caregivers, and special services for high- risk youth</li> <li>2. Strengthen collaboration and alignment throughout systems influencing foster youth outcomes</li> <li>3. Develop and disseminate knowledge for the field</li> </ol>
<b>key outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TAY are prepared for college and career success</li> <li>• Caregivers effectively support TAY and prepare them to transition out of care</li> <li>• Better outcomes for pregnant and parenting teens and crossover youth</li> <li>• Agencies and providers work to develop shared goals and align activities</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many barriers preventing alignment and collaboration among providers are removed</li> <li>• Development and sharing of a strong evidence base of best practices</li> <li>• More funding supports effective practices and policies</li> </ul>
<b>5-year results*</b>	<p><u>Youth Results</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Education</i>: Postsecondary and employment outcomes improved for 50 percent of TAY in LA and NYC</li> <li>• <i>Caregivers</i>: Capacity improved for caregivers of 90 percent of TAY in LA and NYC</li> <li>• <i>Vulnerable Youth</i>: Improved long-term outcomes for 50 percent of parenting foster youth and crossover youth in LA and NYC</li> </ul> <p><u>System Improvement Results</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create / strengthen cross-sector coordinated efforts</li> <li>• Annual convenings of organizations and agencies supporting TAY</li> <li>• Advocacy resulting in positive and enforced policy for improving outcomes for TAY in target geographies</li> </ul> <p><u>Funding and Knowledge Sharing Results</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research base around programs to improve TAY outcomes is expanded and shared at local and national levels</li> <li>• Evaluation findings are shared to inform public and private investment</li> <li>• Hilton Foundation funding leverages \$20M in private funding in alignment with our goals</li> </ul>
<b>ultimate result</b>	Transition-age youth have the skills and supports they need to live healthy and productive lives

\* Preliminary outcomes and results, to be refined during evaluation design

# Strategy Overview

## Commitment to Addressing Foster Youth

Care and service for the most vulnerable have been central components of the mission of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation since its establishment in 1944. Conrad N. Hilton's last will and testament specifically stated his desire to "...shelter little children with the umbrella of [charity]." In addition, his will states, "...Our fellow men deserve to be loved and encouraged—never to be abandoned to wander alone in poverty and darkness." Given the troubled future and dire outcomes faced by children in the foster care system in the United States, providing support and resources to foster youth fits within the Foundation's core mission.

While the Foundation has impacted the lives of children for decades through its grants, a strategic focus on vulnerable children has only emerged in the past few years. Domestically, foster youth have been identified as a vulnerable target group, while children affected by HIV / AIDS have emerged as the international focus to serve vulnerable children. In the past, the Foundation has supported a range of foster youth organizations; going forward, the Foundation has reshaped its strategic focus to increase the impact of its efforts in this important area.

The Hilton Foundation's identification of foster youth as a strategic focus area, and its forthcoming increase in funding, provide an opportunity to have a substantial impact on thousands of children. Core to the Hilton Foundation grantmaking approach are long-term commitment and leverage, both of which are key components of the new strategic approach. A focus on high-risk populations among foster youth, along with specific programmatic interventions for the general foster youth population, will leverage funding that supports related programs. Strengthening collaboration and alignment throughout systems influencing outcomes, as well as developing and disseminating knowledge about what works, enables both short-term and long-term improvement in foster youth outcomes.

## ***Strategy Development Process***

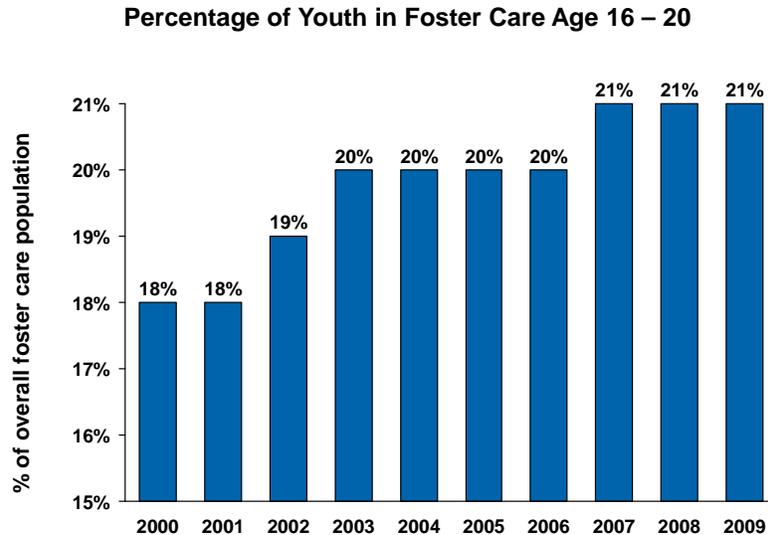
Based on interests expressed by the Foundation's board of directors at its 2008 retreat, the Foundation engaged FSG to research and understand the issue of foster youth and develop a strategic approach for achieving large-scale and sustainable change. In August 2011, the board of directors reaffirmed foster youth as a strategic initiative area and instructed the staff to refine the Foundation's strategy to achieve measurable outcomes. This work included the following:

- *Landscape Assessment*: outlining the scope and dimensions of the problem and identifying successful models for change
- *Stakeholder Input*: compiling the perspectives of former foster youth, experts, public sector leaders, service providers, and philanthropic funders on trends and opportunities to improve outcomes for foster youth, gathered through interviews and convenings
- *Strategy Development*: synthesizing the above information to identify key levers for change that can maximize the Foundation's impact on foster youth

The sections that follow outline the findings and strategy resulting from this exploration.

## Situation Analysis: Scope of the Problem

In 2010, the U.S. government assumed the responsibility for parenting over 400,000 children across the country.<sup>2</sup> While the number of foster youth in the system has declined 22 percent since 2000, a large number of youth still remain in the system. Among those who remain in the system, older youth (age 16 to 20) represent an increasing percentage of the total population of youth in foster care.<sup>3</sup>



Most children in the foster care system are placed with foster families rather than group home settings, typically leading to better outcomes, but older youth are more likely to remain in the system without achieving permanency. While child welfare systems are fairly successful in achieving permanent homes for children exiting care—through reunification with their biological parents or adoption—over 30 percent of children who entered the child welfare system when they were older than age 12 never leave care to a permanent home and thus age out.<sup>4</sup>

Around 30,000 youth per year exit the system by aging out, and this number is increasing despite decreases in the overall foster youth population.

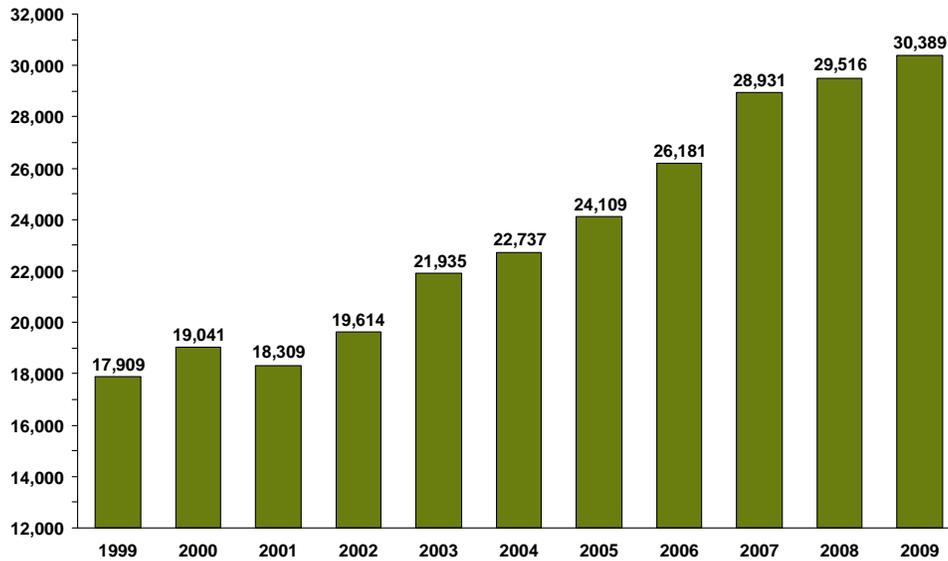
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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Children's Bureau, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, (2011), "Trends in Foster Care and Adoption."

<sup>3</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation, The, *Kids Count Data Center*.

<sup>4</sup> Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS); U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Child and Family Services, (2009), "Child Welfare Outcomes: 2004-2007 Report to Congress."

## National Number of Youth Aging Out of Foster Care <sup>5</sup>



**These foster youth who age out of the system face especially bleak futures.** While around 85 percent of foster youth exit care to a permanent home every year (through reunification with their parents, other family members, adoption, or guardianship), the remaining 30,000 youth age out of the foster care system. These youth often leave the system with low educational attainment levels, little if any job experience, no place to live, and no adult connection to help them learn how to live independently. It is no surprise, then, that foster youth who age out of the system demonstrate even worse outcomes than other foster youth:

- **Prison:** 25 percent of youth who age out of the system are incarcerated within two years<sup>6</sup>
- **Health:** 50 percent of youth in foster care suffer from mental health problems;<sup>7</sup> half of the young women exiting the foster care system have been pregnant by age 19<sup>8</sup>
- **Sex Trafficking:** As a vulnerable youth population without meaningful adult support, many foster youth and former foster youth fall victim to sex trafficking<sup>9</sup>
- **Homelessness:** In Los Angeles County, 65 percent leave foster care without a place to live, and 27 percent of the homeless population spent time in foster care<sup>10</sup>
- **Secondary Education:** Only 63 percent of TAY earn a high school degree or GED by age 19<sup>11</sup>
- **Post-secondary Education:** Fewer than 11 percent earn a postsecondary degree<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> McCoy-Roth, et al, (2010), "Numbers of Youth Aging Out of Foster Care Continues to Rise; Increasing 64 Percent since 1999." Fostering Connections Resource Center. Child Welfare Information Gateway, (2011), "Foster Care Statistics 2009."

<sup>6</sup> Pew Charitable Trust and Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, (2007), "Time for Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own."

<sup>7</sup> Pecora, et al., (2005), "Improving family foster care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study." Casey Family Programs.

<sup>8</sup> Courtney, et al., (2005), "Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 19," Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago."

<sup>9</sup> Smith et al., (2009), "The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America's Prostituted Children." Shared Hope International.

<sup>10</sup> Independent Living Program Policy Unit, Child and Youth Permanency Branch, California Department of Social Services, (2002), "Report on the Survey of the Housing Needs of Emancipated Foster / Probation Youth."

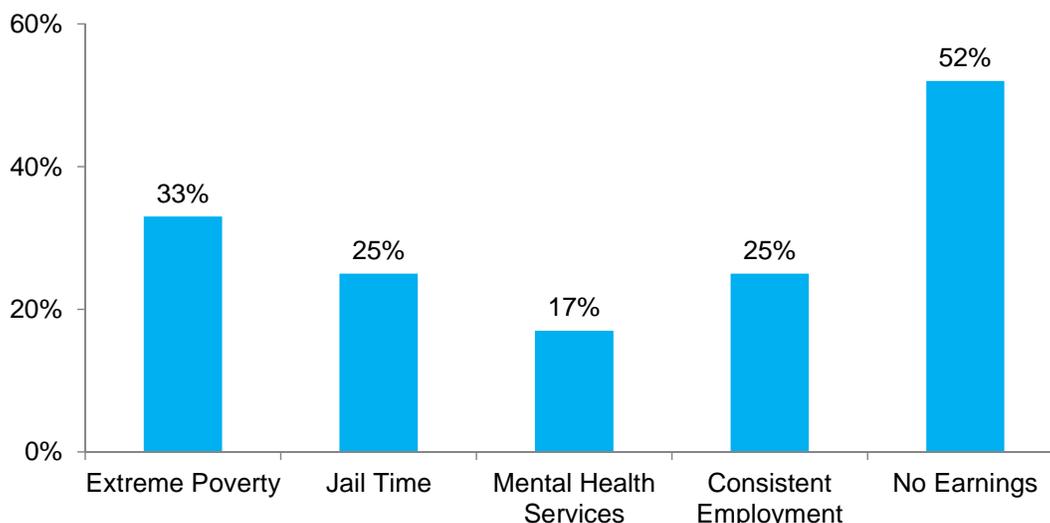
<sup>11</sup> Courtney, et al., (2005)

<sup>12</sup> Courtney, et al., (2005); Stuart Foundation, (2011), "First Look: Foster Youth Education Outcomes in Four California Counties."

- **Earnings:** During the four years after leaving foster care, more than half of youth who transition out of the system have no earnings, and those with earnings average an income of \$7,500 per year<sup>13</sup>

A study of the outcomes of former foster youth in Los Angeles County revealed that these youth experienced severe poverty, mental health problems, and jail time. One-third of youth who aged out of the foster care system experienced a period of extreme poverty in the four years after leaving care; one quarter spent time in jail; nearly 20 percent received outpatient mental health services; around one quarter of TAY were consistently employed; slightly over half of all exiters had no earnings in the four years after leaving care. In addition, while around 45 percent enrolled in a community college in Los Angeles County, fewer than 2 percent received an associate degree. The study also revealed that youth who aged out of foster care in LA County use government services heavily, in particular public welfare.<sup>14</sup>

**Outcomes for Individuals Aging Out of Foster Care**  
Child Welfare Exiters, 2002 and 2004<sup>15</sup>



Because of the especially poor outcomes for those youth who age out of the system, the Foundation has narrowed its strategic focus to improving outcomes for youth transitioning out of foster care.

**Several factors can affect a transition-age youth’s chances of success in life.**

Although foster youth face dire outcomes, research has pointed to factors that increase a youth’s chance of success. Foster youth placed in a family setting—with a foster parent, a relative, or an adoptive home—generally fare better than those placed in a non-family setting, such as an institution. For this reason, many states have emphasized finding permanent family placements for foster youth and reduced the number of children in group care.

<sup>13</sup> Culhane, et al., (2011), “Young Adult Outcomes of Youth Exiting Dependent or Delinquent Care in Los Angeles County,” The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*

Caregivers in these foster homes play a critical role in supporting youth growing up in the system. However, the system, including training for caregivers, is largely designed for younger children, and caregivers often lack the skills and support needed to care for teenage foster youth. As a result, while the family setting is better for the youth's development, caregivers often cannot and do not provide the resources and support needed to help older youth in care thrive.

Stability of placement also affects outcomes for foster youth. Half of the youth in the foster care system change placement five or more times. The change in placement disrupts a youth's life significantly. Despite policies to the contrary, new placements can lead to changes in school, which significantly affect academic and social development. Health services also can be disrupted, as youth may no longer be able to access the local community health centers or providers they accessed in a previous placement. Each new setting can lead to lost personal connections, such as siblings, caring adults, neighbors, and friends. All of these factors increase the trauma that these already vulnerable youth undergo.

Unfortunately, securing a placement in a stable, consistent family setting is especially difficult for teenagers in the foster care system. These youth are less likely to secure a stable placement because many prospective caregivers prefer to work with younger children with less serious behavioral challenges; those who are placed in family settings may exhibit behavioral issues that are difficult for caregivers who are not adequately trained. Even well-meaning acts initiated by the system, such as moving youth to be near family members or siblings, contribute to a lack of stability. Each move compounds the challenges these youth face in recovering from the trauma that brought them into the system and in building a meaningful connection to an adult.

Strong high school education improves outcomes for foster youth as they pursue both postsecondary education and employment. High school academic proficiency and ultimate graduation rates for foster youth, however, lag significantly below the general population. For example, 11<sup>th</sup> grade students in foster care are half as likely to achieve proficiency in English, and five times less likely to achieve proficiency in math, as the general student population. Moreover, while over 70 percent of transition-age foster youth express a desire to continue education after college, only 40 to 50 percent earn any college credits, and only between 1 and 11 percent complete a postsecondary degree or certificate.<sup>16</sup>

Among teenage foster youth, researchers have identified two sub-groups that suffer from especially poor outcomes: parenting teens and youth who "crossover" between the foster care system and the juvenile justice system. Among young women in foster care, nearly half of the girls who transition out of the system had been pregnant by age 19, compared with 20 percent of 19-year-old women nationally. Of girls who had been pregnant, 46 percent had been pregnant more than once. These teen parents have poorer outcomes than their non-parenting peers: only 40 percent of teen mothers graduate from high school and only 5 percent complete two years of college by their late 20s. Only 2 percent complete a postsecondary degree. These teen foster parents are also twice as likely as parents with no such history to see their own children placed in foster care or become homeless—continuing the cycle of foster care.<sup>17</sup>

Crossover youth, the 10 to 15 percent of youth involved in both the foster care and juvenile justice systems, struggle in transition to adulthood. Research on crossover youth in Los Angeles found that they are 90 percent less likely than other foster care exiters to complete an associate degree or enroll at a four-year university. Half of crossover youth experienced a period of extreme poverty after their

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<sup>16</sup> Courtney, et al., (2005); Stuart Foundation, (2011), "First Look: Foster Youth Education Outcomes in Four California Counties."

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

transition from care, earning \$3,500 per year or less. After transition from foster care, this group also uses public resources extensively and is more likely to use multiple public benefits: 82 percent of crossover youth received public welfare benefits during their first four years out of care compared with 68 percent of other former foster youth.<sup>18</sup>

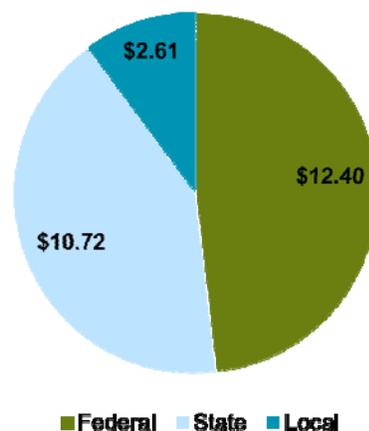
Although the overall population of foster youth has recently decreased, the percentage of older youth in the foster care system has increased. In certain locations, such as New York, the number of older youth in foster care has dramatically increased; the number of teenagers entering foster care in New York increased by more than 50 percent between 2000 and 2009.<sup>19</sup> The challenges around quality foster family placements, education, pregnancy, and crossover with the juvenile justice system are especially relevant to this teenage population. As the percentage of foster youth who are teenagers continues to increase, finding solutions to these issues will become an even more pressing need.

## Funding Landscape

Annual public expenditures to support child welfare total nearly \$26 billion, with federal funding comprising nearly half of child welfare public spending. While nearly half the funding comes from federal spending, state and local policymakers have significant influence over how child welfare funds are administered.<sup>20</sup>

While private funding resources are dwarfed by public funding, there are several foundations that are active in this space. Philanthropic funds dedicated specifically to foster youth are estimated to be approximately \$175 million a year, but a significantly larger share of funding targeting vulnerable youth also reaches the foster youth population. Among foundations in this field, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Casey Family Programs are national, strategic philanthropic leaders. In addition to these national foundations, there are many geography-specific funders such as Stuart Foundation working to improve foster youth outcomes in their regions.

**Foster Care Public Spending (\$B), 2006**



<sup>18</sup> Culhane, et al., (2011).

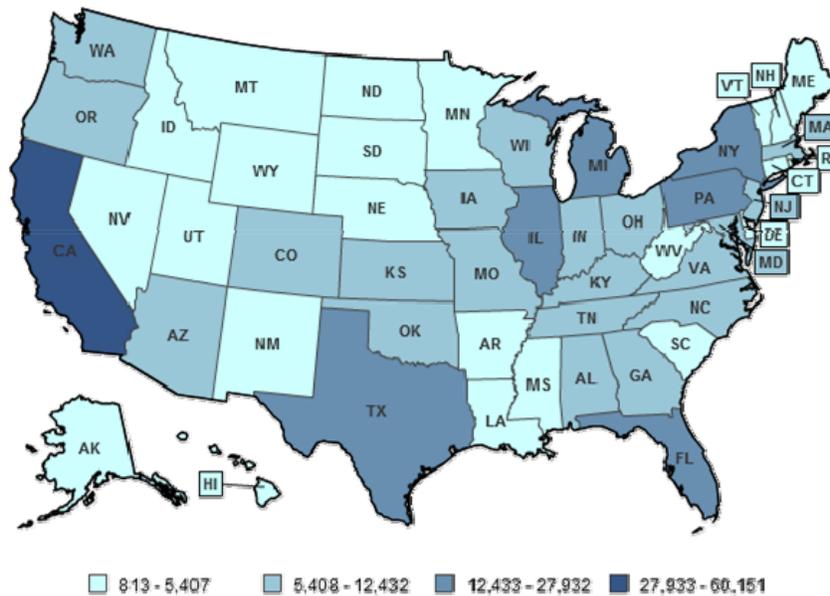
<sup>19</sup> New York City's Administration for Children's Services, (2010), "NYC 2010 Community Snapshots."

<sup>20</sup> CLASP, (2010), *State Fact Sheets on Child Welfare Funding 2010*.

## Geographic Focus

Consistent with the Foundation’s approach to strategic philanthropy, the strategy focuses on geographies showing significant need, a strong local commitment to the issue, a readiness for reform, and the opportunity to leverage funding. The population of foster youth is dispersed across the country. By focusing on regions with the highest concentration of youth aging out of the system, the Foundation will effectively reach a large number of vulnerable youth.

Children Aged 0-17 in Foster Care, 2009 <sup>21</sup>



With 60,000 youth in foster care, California has the largest foster youth population.<sup>22</sup> Child welfare in California is administered at the county level, and within California, Los Angeles County has the largest population of foster youth with 33 percent of the state total. California also accounts for 15 percent of the nation’s youth aging out of care each year (5,000 youth). Between 1,600 and 2,000 youth age out of foster care in Los Angeles each year. The next-largest county, Riverside County, only accounts for 7 percent of the total youth in care.<sup>23</sup> California holds promise for making an impact through strategic philanthropy, due to its policy environment and potential to leverage funds from public and private funders. California also recently enacted pioneering reform in foster care which extends benefits for foster youth until age 21, and a cross-sector group of leaders across the state and in Los Angeles County have already shown a commitment to working together to ensure effective implementation of legislation. In addition, the Foundation will look to build on its existing relationships with funders and the public sector can be leveraged for greater impact. Work in Los Angeles provides an opportunity to set an example for the nation in support of transition-age youth.

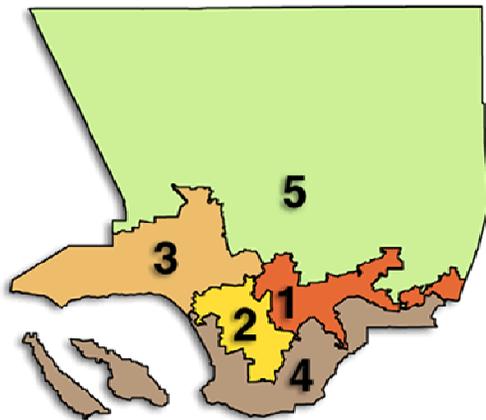
<sup>21</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation, *The Kids Count Data Center*, “Aging Out: Improving Outcomes for Older Foster Care Youth.”

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

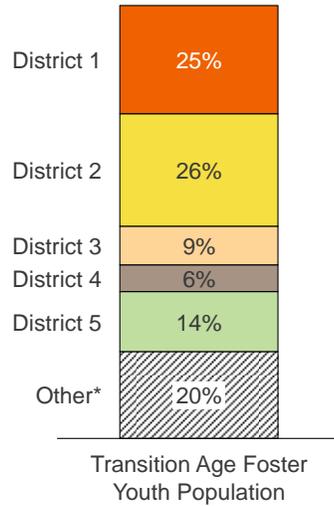
<sup>23</sup> *Child Welfare Performance Indicators Project*, Center for Social Services Research, UC Berkley.

### Half of Los Angeles County's TAY Reside in Districts One and Two<sup>24</sup>

LA County Foster Youth Population by Supervisorial District (December 2011)



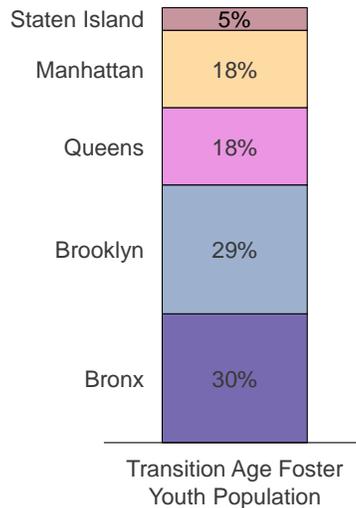
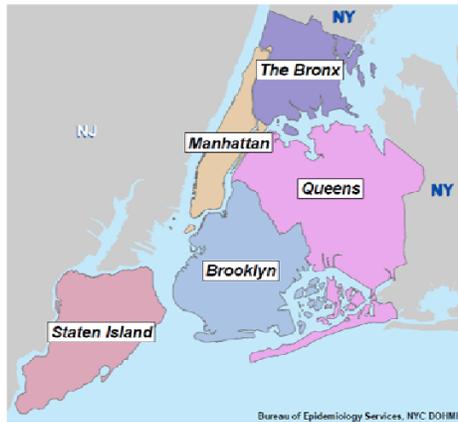
\*Includes out of county or invalid addresses



New York State has the second largest population of foster youth in the country, with 28,000 youth in care. Approximately 1,500 TAY age out of care each year in New York, two-thirds of which are in New York City. The importance of addressing challenges facing transition-age youth has increased since 2000, as the number of youth between the ages of 16 and 20 entering foster care has increased by 50 percent over that timeframe.<sup>25</sup> As in California, child welfare is administered at the county level in New York,<sup>26</sup> and the city's legislative environment is widely viewed as progressive, with momentum for reform across key public sector and nonprofit stakeholders. In addition, New York has strong potential funding partners, with whom there is an opportunity to leverage investments in alignment with the Foundation's priorities.

### The Majority of TAY in NYC Live in Brooklyn and the Bronx<sup>27</sup>

NYC Foster Youth Population by Borough



<sup>24</sup> ibid

<sup>25</sup> New York City's Administration for Children's Services, (2010), "NYC 2010 Community Snapshots."

<sup>26</sup> New York City, comprised of the five boroughs, is the "county" for NYC.

<sup>27</sup> New York City's Administration for Children's Services, (2010), "NYC 2010 Community Snapshots."

For these reasons, as well as the potential for cross-geography learning, the Foundation will focus its strategy on the 8,900 transition-age youth in Los Angeles County and New York City.

## **Strategic Opportunities**

Research suggests that increased educational attainment for older youth is a critical driver of improved long-term outcomes. However, most youth who age out of foster care are not academically prepared for college or employment, and as a consequence, these youth need academic remediation upon arrival to college. Compounding their low educational achievement levels, youth often struggle to access potential resources, such as SAT prep classes, financial aid, and other supplemental resources, due to both a lack of availability and low awareness of these programs. In addition, the education and child welfare systems historically have not promoted postsecondary education for these youth, further limiting support for foster youth who choose to pursue it. College readiness programs designed specifically for foster youth and the promotion of existing available programs will help improve college attainment.

As a consequence of low educational achievement, less work experience, and fewer connections to adults in the workplace prior to age 18 compared to other youth, transition-age foster youth are not prepared to hold living-wage jobs with opportunities for growth. Increased college and career readiness and internship programs focused on these youth will contribute to college enrollment and completion, and improved employment outcomes.

In addition to education and job placement support, caregivers more able to support older youth will help improve TAY outcomes. Foster parents are the most consistent presence in the lives of foster youth—75 to 90 percent of foster youth in Los Angeles and New York live with foster families.<sup>28</sup> Foster youth need these caregivers to be a supportive and stable adult presence in their lives to help them transition to adulthood and out of foster care.

Despite their importance in foster youth success, foster parents are not well prepared to support adolescent youth development, nor to help youth navigate their transition out of care. In the words of the New York City Administration for Children's Services Commissioner Ronald Richter, "We are using services for children to treat young adults." Programs and system change are needed to improve recruiting, support, and training for caregivers of older foster youth, so they are well prepared to support the development and transition of these youth.

Strong opportunities emerged to improve outcomes for specific high-risk foster youth: parenting teens and crossover youth. Supporting parenting teens and postponing foster youth pregnancy improves their outcomes and breaks the foster care cycle, as offspring of foster youth are at high risk of entering the child welfare system themselves. Opportunities include:

- Developing an evidence base for what works in teaching healthy childrearing to parenting foster youth and postponing foster youth pregnancy. While an evidence-based model for pregnancy postponement is not codified, there is national-level support for developing promising models.
- Support for improved education outcomes, and for strengthening caregivers ability to work with older foster youth, will also contribute to reducing the number of parenting foster youth.
- Systemic change is needed to improve outcomes for parenting foster youth, and ensure these mothers are able to raise their children in a healthy environment. Child welfare policy and case-

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<sup>28</sup> Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), (2011).

by-case court decisions also play an important role in supporting those youth who do become pregnant and enabling the young mothers to be placed in care with their children.

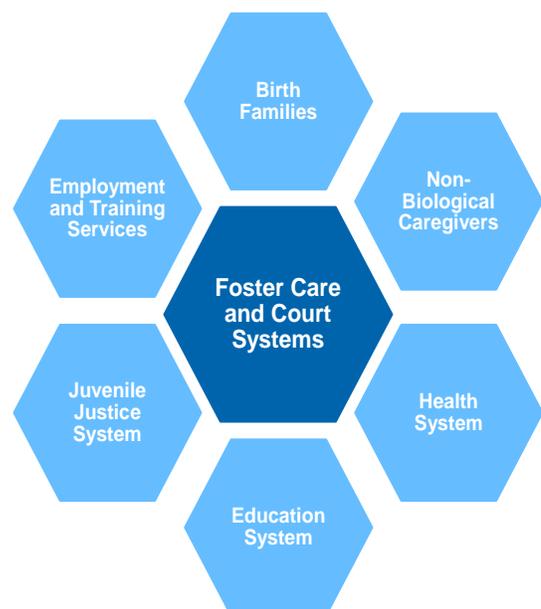
- Working with judges—a group that has contributed to teen pregnancy postponement by actively mandating that social workers provide a connected adult / active caregiver for the youth—to involve the youth and adult in case planning, provide targeted caregiver training, and provide youth with evidence-based programs promoting healthy relationships, good decision making, and positive youth development.

Focused attention on improving outcomes for crossover youth presents an opportunity to reach a high-need group and reduce costs to society. Crossover youth have the poorest long-term outcomes of all youth who transition out of foster care, and therefore represent the greatest use of government services. Because crossover youth are among the most costly former foster youth to society, preventing youth from crossing over to delinquency will benefit these youths' long-term outcomes and save public systems and tax-payers significant investment. Opportunities include:

- Developing programs to prevent delinquency, improve services for youth, and reduce recidivism. A range of activities including improving education outcomes, caregiver quality, mental health and substance abuse services, secure housing, and employment opportunities all contribute to preventing youth from crossing over to the juvenile justice system.
- Ensuring youth have access to quality legal counsel, that a range of community-based programs exist to support high-risk youth, and that youth family and community participation is integrated into programs supporting youth who are at risk of crossing over.
- Improving the coordination and planning between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. For example, LA County is doing innovative work to bring the juvenile justice and child welfare departments together to plan for addressing the needs of crossover youth. Multidisciplinary teams (from the departments of mental health, child welfare, juvenile justice, and education, as well as lawyers) have formed around these youth to determine the resources needed for individual youth to achieve positive outcomes.
- As the vast majority of these crossover foster youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system commit non-violent property or drug crimes, addressing policies that drive incarceration rates are also important for finding alternatives to sentencing.

On a systemic level, the well-being of foster youth depends on the complex interaction of multiple systems and stakeholders. While the child welfare and court systems are directly responsible for these youths' outcomes, a range of other systems also play a critical role in foster youth success. These other systems, such as the education or health system, will benefit from greater alignment with the foster care system in terms of the daily practice of working with individual youth or at the policy level of systemic support for youth. While not an easy task, improving alignment and coordination across the systems influencing foster youth outcomes provides an opportunity to create meaningful lasting, county-wide change.

### Systems Influencing Foster Youth Outcomes



## Proposed Strategy

Building on this research, the Hilton Foundation Board of Directors has approved a strategy to maximize the Hilton Foundation's impact in the lives of vulnerable foster youth. The strategy will focus on youth transitioning out care in Los Angeles County and New York City

The strategy is based upon five design principles:

### Design Principles:

1. Reach a large and vulnerable foster care population
2. Drive systemic change
3. Achieve significant and measurable impact
4. Align with other Hilton Foundation initiatives
5. Leverage public and private funds and partnerships

Based on the above, the following are the vision, three key initiative areas, and target outcomes.

**Vision:** Youth transitioning out of care are on the path to success, able to live self-sufficiently and with the interpersonal connections they need to thrive

### Three Initiative Areas:

1. **Increase transition age youth (TAY) self-sufficiency through improved college and career readiness, stronger caregivers, and special services for high-risk youth.** Support programs that will improve foster youth college and career readiness, strengthen caregivers, and provide special services for high-risk youth. College and career readiness will be improved through programs that prepare foster youth academically and with the life skills needed to succeed. Caregiver capacity will be strengthened through programs that improve their ability to effectively support older foster youth and prepare them to transition out of foster care. High-risk youth will be supported by improving outcomes for pregnant and parenting foster youth mothers and postponing pregnancies, and through improving outcomes for crossover youth. This work will be focused in Los Angeles County and New York City, and will be delivered through nonprofit and public sector partners.
2. **Strengthen collaboration and alignment throughout systems influencing foster youth outcomes.** Targeted approaches to improving collaboration and alignment will address specific gaps, such as the disconnect between the foster care and education systems. Comprehensive approaches will promote system alignment and coordination across all key organizations influencing TAY outcomes. The Foundation's work in this initiative area will focus on capacity strengthening, facilitating cross system coordination, and promoting policy change and alignment in order to move systems toward greater collaboration. This work will be focused in Los Angeles County and New York City.
3. **Develop and disseminate knowledge for the field.** Research will be used to inform the field's knowledge on how to improve TAY outcomes and will be disseminated in key local and national forums. Evaluation will be used to measure the impact and identify learnings from Hilton

Foundation grants to inform the Foundation's work and share learning with the field. Sharing leanings on the local and national level will drive best practice in the field and leverage toward the policies and programs that work.

By pursuing this focused foster youth strategy, the Hilton Foundation will have tremendous impact on the 8,900 foster youth over age 15 in Los Angeles County and New York City.

With the anticipated levels of strategic grantmaking and non-grantmaking investment from the Hilton Foundation, we expect the following results in our target geographies in five years:

***Expected 5-Year Results, to be refined upon evaluation design:***

Youth Results

- **Education:** Postsecondary outcomes improved for **50 percent** of TAY in LA and NYC
- **Caregivers:** Capacity improved for caregivers of **90 percent** of TAY in LA and NYC
- **Vulnerable Youth:** Improved long-term outcomes for **50 percent** of parenting foster youth and crossover youth in LA and NYC

System Improvement Results

- Create / strengthen **cross-sector coordinated efforts**
- **Annual convenings** of organizations and agencies supporting TAY
- **Advocacy resulting in positive and enforced policy** for improving outcomes for TAY in target geographies

Funding and Knowledge Sharing Results

- **Research base** around programs to improve TAY outcomes is **expanded and shared at local and national levels**
- **Evaluation findings are shared** to inform public and private investment
- **Hilton Foundation funding** leverages **\$20M** in private funding in alignment with our goals

**Ultimate Result:** Transition-age youth have the skills and supports they need to live healthy and productive lives.

**Appendix 1: Experts and Stakeholders Interviewed by FSG.**

*Does not include additional organizations consulted by the Hilton Foundation.*

**NATIONAL LANDSCAPE**

Annie E. Casey Foundation

Barry University

Bayview Child Health Clinic

California Youth Connections

Casey Family Programs

Center for the Study of Social Policy

Chapin Hall, University of Chicago

Eckerd Family Foundation

Edna McConnell Clark Foundation

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

K&L Gates

Lucille Packard Children’s Hospital

Mainspring Consulting / Foster Care Work Group

National Foster Youth Action Network

SF Child Abuse Prevention Center

Stoneleigh Foundation

Stuart Foundation

Texas Appleseed

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

Tiger Foundation

Tipping Point Foundation

University of Chicago

University of Pennsylvania

Winstead Consulting

Youth Law Center

Youth Villages

## **NEW YORK LANDSCAPE**

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**Andrus Family Fund**

**Annie E. Casey Foundation**

**BNY Mellon**

**Casey Family Programs**

**Center for an Urban Future**

**Columbia University / Workplace Center**

**City University of New York**

**City University of New York Prep**

**FEGS / The Academy**

**Gap Foundation**

**Good Shepherd Services**

**Local Initiatives Support Corporation NYC**

**New York Foundling**

**NYC Administration for Children's Services**

**NYC Administration for Children's Services**

**NYC DOE**

**OSI**

**Pinkerton Foundation**

**Robin Hood Foundation**

**The Door**

**The Fund for Public Schools**

**The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections**

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## **LOS ANGELES LANDSCAPE**

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**Alliance for Children's Rights**

**California Child Welfare Co-investment Partnership**

**Casey Family Programs**

**Center for Social Service Research, UC Berkeley**

**Child Welfare Initiative**

**Children's Law Center**

**DCFS / Crossover Youth Initiative**

**DCFS / Youth Development Services**

**First Place for Youth**

**Five Acres**

**LA County 1st District Office**

**Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office**

**Stuart Foundation**

**United Friends of the Children**

**Walter S. Johnson Foundation**

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