

CONRAD N.



FOUNDATION

Foster Youth Strategic Initiative

2016 Evaluation Report



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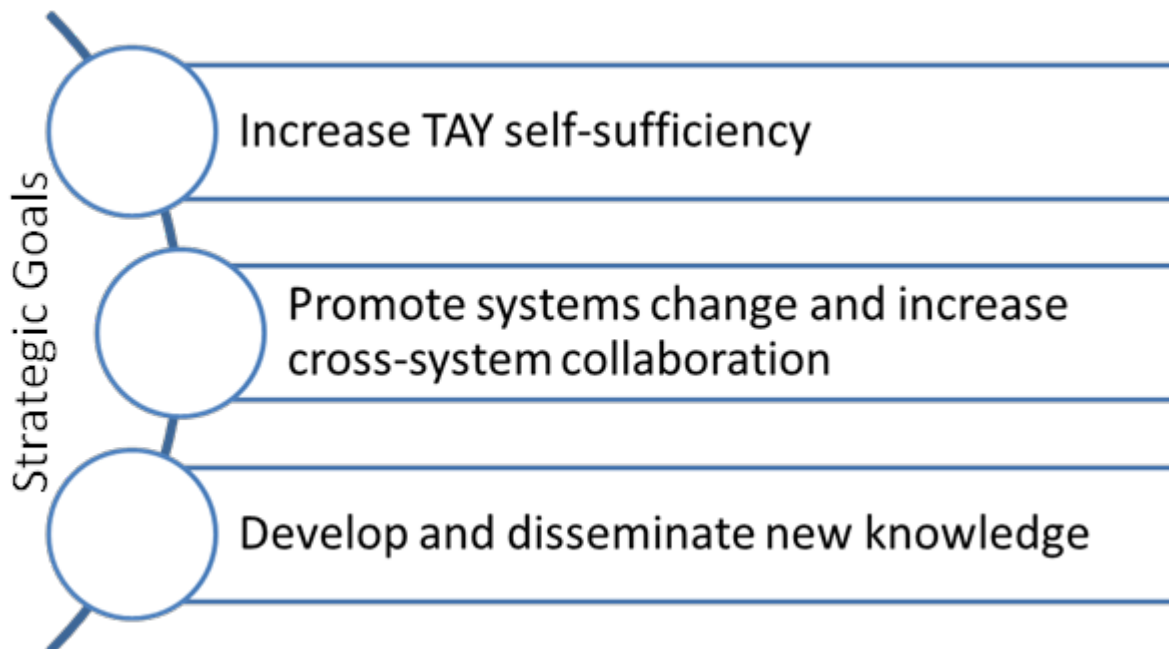
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

The Conrad N. Hilton Foster Youth Strategic Initiative (FYSI) grew out of an extensive research and synthesis process that included the perspectives of a wide variety of stakeholders. Ultimately, the process helped the Foundation better understand the challenges facing transition age youth (TAY) and identify successful models for change; this work became the foundation for FYSI. In February 2012, the Board of Directors approved FYSI and it launched in March 2012. The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) component (or evaluation) began in March 2013.

The FYSI is focused on TAY, 16-24 years old, from two regions with large child welfare (and foster care) populations: Los Angeles County (LAC) and New York City (NYC). The Foundation chose to focus its efforts in LAC and NYC due to the strong commitment of the public child welfare and supporting agencies to issues affecting TAY and their readiness for policy and system reform and opportunities to leverage funding.

To address the myriad issues facing TAY, those in care and transitioning out of care, the Foundation provides grants to organizations and entities with the potential to meet the three overarching goals of FYSI, to: (1) increase **TAY self-sufficiency**, (2) strengthen and increase **cross-system collaboration** and promote **systems change**, and (3) develop and disseminate **new knowledge** about the needs of TAY and effective strategies for meeting those needs.



As of June 2016, the Foundation has awarded \$46,532,500 to 44 grantees as part of FYSI. Overall, there were 38 Foundation grantees¹ active during this reporting period: 23 grantees are working in LAC, 10 grantees are working in NYC, and 5 grantees are considered “dual geography,” as they are conducting work in both LAC and NYC.

The Evaluation

Westat, in partnership with the University of California, Los Angeles Luskin School of Public Affairs, and Action Research Partners, is conducting the MEL component of the FYSI in LAC and NYC. The primary goal of the MEL is to inform the Foundation, its grantees, and other stakeholders about salient learnings and accomplishments throughout implementation of the initiative.

The FYSI is built on a theory of change that proposes that funding a strategic, three-component initiative (self-sufficiency services, systems change, and new knowledge development) will increase the likelihood of improving outcomes for TAY in LAC and NYC. The evaluation is not a program evaluation; that is, it is not designed to measure program outcomes at the grantee level. Instead, it is focused on the overall strategy and its ability to influence change in key youth, systems change, and knowledge sharing and leveraged funding goals.

1. Are TAY in LAC/NYC on a better path to success?
2. What impact did the Hilton Foster Youth Initiative have on the grantees' programs?
3. What changes have occurred in LAC/NYC in collaboration and alignment of systems serving TAY? How did the Initiative contribute to these changes?
4. What impacts did the knowledge grantees have on policy, practice, and research innovations?

The MEL team continues to implement a multi-method approach to answer these four research questions:

This report covers evaluation activities from June 2015 – August 2016.² Specifically, it covers evaluation findings from grantee interviews, progress reports, and data collection

¹ Some grantees are funded to work in more than one area.

² Grantees have different timelines for reporting on their progress, and their activities cover a wider time period.

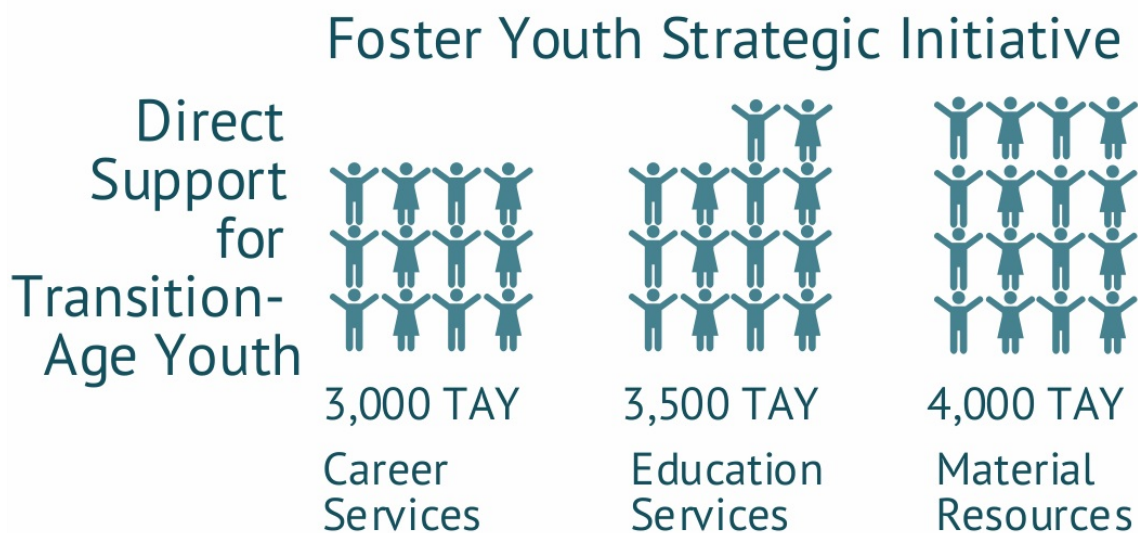
forms. It further summarizes recent policy and systems reform efforts and presents outcome data (administrative in nature) that are aligned with FYSI goals.

Transition Age Youth Goals

First and foremost, grantees are making progress toward TAY self-sufficiency goals. Based in part on policy changes and systems reform efforts in both LAC and NYC, we are seeing TAY remaining in care for longer periods.

In LAC, the number of youth **age 18–20** increased from **2009** to **2015** while the number of youth under 18 declined. In NYC, the number of youth **age 18 and older** decreased somewhat, but the **proportion of TAY** age 18 and older increased during this same time period (2009 to 2015).

There has been significant movement around improving educational outcomes for TAY. Since FYSI began, grantees have provided almost 3,500 TAY with education-focused services, over 3,000 TAY with career readiness or employment services, and almost 4,000 TAY with connections to material resources necessary for school success. Most foster youth in LAC and NYC are enrolled in school, and ever-increasing numbers of TAY are attending college, whether at a 2- or 4-year institution or vocational training program.



With regard to employment, several grantees provided critical opportunities for TAY, including the Aspen Institute, which launched the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative, creating “more pathways to economic prosperity for youth.” Catalyzed with assistance from the Foundation, the initiative is quickly becoming one of the largest employer-led youth employment coalitions in the country. Meanwhile, iFoster’s Jobs Program saw its first 150 TAY participants gain employment under the program.

On the topic of pregnant and parenting and crossover youth, grantees are also making progress. FYSI grantees reported providing direct services to 218 pregnant or parenting TAY, including parenting classes, skill-building workshops, and connecting youth with other services and resources. Dr. Emily Putnam Horstein’s groundbreaking research on pregnant and parenting youth continues to shape the national agenda around serving this subpopulation of TAY.

Crossover youth continue to pose a challenge to the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. In LAC, 42 percent of foster youth surveyed reported they have been arrested, 26 percent have been convicted of a crime, and 26 percent have been confined in a facility such as jail or juvenile detention as a result of allegedly committing a crime; whereas in NYC, the number of foster youth with at least one incidence of absence to detention has remained relatively stable from 2009 to 2015. But grantees are making progress here too. One of the four grantees funded specifically to work with this vulnerable youth population served 315 crossover youth in the last 2 years, but more importantly, is creating systems reform through advocacy and education to increase awareness of the particular needs and challenges crossover youth face, and the services designed to assist them.

Trends for Transition-Age Youth in LAC and NYC since 2010

Youth staying in care longer (age 18+)	↑
Youth attending college or vocational school	↑
Employment opportunities for youth	↑
Services for pregnant and parenting youth	↑
Number of crossover youth	—
Awareness of crossover youth needs and issues	↑
Training and support for caregivers	↑

Finally, grantees continue to promote activities focused on supporting caregivers, reaching over 5,756 caregivers and service providers and staff who work with caregivers, with much of this activity focused on trainings and other supports to improve educational outcomes for TAY.

Systems Change Goals

Cross-sector coordination and collaboration is a persistent strength of FYSI grantees. Each year the MEL has assessed cross-sector coordination and collaboration, and each year it has gotten stronger. The second stage of the social network analysis confirms clear evidence of network growth over time: the network now includes new and more connections among grantees, more connections between grantees and partner agencies, and has shown a significant increase in partner agencies.



Advocacy remains one of the strongest areas of progress for the grantees. Grantees continue to give voice to foster youth by representing their interests in national and state legislative activities, and advocating for efforts to improve educational outcomes, coordinate and expand employment opportunities, improve data available to track youth outcomes, and ensure caregivers have the resources they need to effectively parent and support the youth in their care.

Grantees' advocacy work also continues to inform TAY progress. As foster youth have limited ability to influence political, social, or economic change themselves, they need trusted advocates, like the grantees, to represent their views where they matter most—around policies that significantly impact their well-being. This report contains numerous examples of grantees' advocacy work and the influence it is having in shaping child welfare policy and practice at both the national and local level.

Grantees also continue to make enormous strides to disseminate knowledge about their work with the larger child welfare policy and research and practice communities, and

leverage funding to support this work. Over the past 3 years, grantees have made thousands of presentations, authored hundreds of publications, and been cited extensively in the media—advancing the reach of their efforts enormously. Research grantees are producing and disseminating findings via less traditional avenues like public events and “issue briefs” that are changing the landscape for TAY by helping child welfare and juvenile justice policymakers, practitioners, and other researchers understand their status and the factors that contribute to it, and recommend areas for further study.

Finally, grantees have far surpassed leveraged funding expectations of \$20 million by reporting more than \$45 million in total leveraged funds, with \$31 million in leveraged funding from private sources and almost \$12 million from public sources. This information alone demonstrates the pronounced impact FYSI has had on grantees and TAY alike, but when coupled with the other progress highlighted in this report, it becomes more obvious that FYSI has had a profound and lasting impact on the child welfare community, not just in LAC and NYC, but across the nation.

Recommendations

As FYSI moves into its fourth year, and efforts are underway to prepare for the future of it, it is an appropriate time for the Foundation to take stock of its achievements and determine how best to focus its future FYSI efforts. Throughout this report, we highlight the successes that grantees have achieved both in the past year and across the 3-year FYSI period—and they are substantial. However, we also highlight areas where work still needs to be done; these provide a starting point for the Foundation as it considers how best to focus FYSI targets moving forward.

Based on our experience and the information we have collected and reported on over the past 3 years, we make recommendations for taking FYSI further and increasing its impact. These recommendations are made in four areas:

- Build the evidence base for *what works* to improve educational outcomes for TAY;
- Create more inroads into understanding the status of pregnant and parenting and crossover youth, the factors that contribute to their status, and how best to serve them;
- Improve the availability and accessibility of cross-system data to track outcomes for TAY; and
- Continue to support dissemination and information-sharing activities to promote FYSI’s reach beyond the child welfare community and promote “translational knowledge” among grantees.