



Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

Foster Youth Strategic Initiative

2015 EVALUATION REPORT

PREPARED FOR:

Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

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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. The FYSI launched in March 2012; the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) component (or evaluation) began in March 2013.

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: (1) to increase **TAY self-sufficiency**, (2) to **strengthen and increase cross-system collaboration** and promote **systems change**, and (3) to develop and disseminate **new knowledge** about the needs of TAY and effective strategies for meeting those needs. As of June 2015, the Foundation has awarded \$32,772,500 to 39 grantees as part of FYSI.

Overall, the Foundation had 37 grantees active during the 2014-15 reporting period



The Evaluation

In 2013, Westat joined with two subcontractors, the University of California, Los Angeles Luskin School of Public Affairs, and the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, to lead the MEL component of the FYSI in Los Angeles County (LAC) and New York City (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. Key goals are presented here; those shown in **green** are the focus of this report.

YOUTH GOALS

Education: Postsecondary outcomes improved for 50% of TAY

Vulnerable Youth: Improved long-term outcomes for 50% of **parenting foster youth**

Vulnerable Youth: Improved long-term outcomes for 50% of **crossover youth**

Caregivers: Capacity improved for caregivers of 90% of TAY.

SYSTEMS CHANGE GOAL

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 & KNOWLEDGE SHARING GOALS

Research base around programs to improve TAY outcomes is expanded and shared at local and national levels

Conrad N. Hilton Foundation funding leverages **\$20M in private funding** in alignment with our goals

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

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?

This report covers findings from (1) grantee progress reports and data collection forms, (2) caregiver agency personnel interviews, and (3) the social network analysis survey. It also presents progress toward developing a set of caregiver competencies to be used by the Foundation, its grantees, and the child welfare community to understand and measure caregiver competence, and covers recent policy and systems reform efforts that have occurred in LAC and NYC and that are aligned with FYSI goals.

Grantee Investments and Results

Based on progress reports, which grantees complete and submit as part of the evaluation, grantees¹ continue to make progress towards *their* stated goals and objectives, with all on track to meet them by the time the initiative ends, if they have not already.

¹ Grantees refers to those grantees who submitted data during the reporting period.

- **TAY self-sufficiency grantees** have directly supported more than 14,000 youth with information, advocacy, and services, with an emphasis on education and employment.

- **Systems change grantees** continue their efforts to initiate and support policies, systems alignment, and interagency collaboration to enhance services for TAY and caregivers. Grantees have conducted more than 100 trainings for almost 2500 individuals, and have held seven policy and community forums and countless meetings to help various stakeholders understand and implement child welfare policies.

- **New knowledge grantees** continue to focus on building knowledge exchange and learning agendas and disseminating research findings. They have hosted meetings to share lessons learned and best practices, conducted surveys with caseworkers and TAY, analyzed data on foster youth characteristics and outcomes, and

presented research findings to more than 1200 individuals representing a variety of audiences (e.g., attorneys, social workers, caregivers, and school personnel).

In the past year, FYSI grantees in New York City and Los Angeles County



...trained over 2,400 workers, judges, attorneys, & advocates on TAY rights & policy



...provided training, resources, and support to over 500 caregivers of TAY



...provided outreach and resources to over 11,500 Transition Age Youth



...provided direct services to over 2,800 Transition Age Youth, including



...helping over 1,600 TAY with college & career readiness



...providing direct services to 343 pregnant & parenting youth



...providing direct services to 190 crossover youth

Caregiver Competencies

Because of the critical role caregivers play in assisting TAY to successfully transition into young adulthood and self-sufficiency, it is important to understand what constitutes effective caregiving. Caregiver agency interviews were conducted as a first step in developing a set of caregiver competencies. To further inform the development of competencies, interview findings were supplemented with a review of the current literature on caregivers, including best practices; consultation with experts in NYC; and a review of the work being conducted around caregivers by Foundation grantees. Based on the findings from these information sources, the evaluation team developed a draft

set of TAY caregiver competencies, grounded in the principles of cultural competence and family engagement, around these seven domains:

1. Basic Foster Parenting Knowledge
2. Communication with Youth
3. Assessment and Individualized Planning
4. Relationship to Family and Community
5. Supporting Educational and Career Success for Youth
6. Supporting Pregnant and Parenting Youth
7. Supporting Crossover Youth

These competencies will be further refined with input from the Foundation and grantees and ultimately be used by them to understand and measure caregiver competence.

Policy and Systems Reform

As part of the FYSI plan, the Foundation chose to fund grantees in LAC and NYC for several reasons, one of which was their readiness for policy and system reform. Both LAC and NYC continue their efforts to affect policy change and systems reform.

LAC. Since the 2012 passage of AB 12 Fostering Connections to Success Act, LAC has implemented several important changes, including creating a single, unified child protection agency and opting into the Approved Relative Caregiver Funding Option Program, which equalizes payments to relative and nonrelative caregivers; ensuring the appropriate implementation of CA's new Local Control Funding Formula; and under the Continuum of Care Reform, making recommendations regarding child welfare rates, group care placements, and training for staff working with traumatized or abused youth.

In addition to AB 12, other recent legislation designed to improve outcomes for foster children has been introduced or passed, including:

- **AB 2454.** Addresses the needs of youth who had originally exited the dependency system through legal guardianship or adoption before 18, but for whom these arrangements failed after turning 18 but before turning 21. The bill allows these youth to reenter foster care as non-minor dependents under AB 12. (August 2014)
- **SB 1023.** Expands resources such as mental health support, tutoring, housing assistance, and an allowance for books to former foster youth at community college campuses through the Extended Opportunities Programs and Services Program (EOPS). (September 2014)
- **AB 388.** To reduce crossover, addresses excessive delinquency filings in group home settings for minor behaviors by allowing for tracking of law enforcement

calls from group homes and review of facilities with inappropriate or excessive use of law enforcement assistance. (September 2014)

- **AB 2668.** Provides parenting non-minor dependents living in a Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP), with the support of an identified responsible adult under a “Shared Responsibility Plan, access to additional funding to support their child.” (September 2014)
- **AB 595.** Amended to ensure that former foster youth continue to have priority enrollment in community colleges.(April 2015)

NYC. NYC has also made progress in this arena. ACS and NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation announced an intra-city agreement to improve mental health services for justice-involved youth, and the Center for Youth Employment opened in May 2015 to offer job and mentoring opportunities to NYC youth, with a special emphasis on shelter and foster youth. Several other NYC child-welfare focused were also launched, including

- ACS launched **Home Away from Home** and **Be the Reason**, two large efforts focused on recruiting and maintaining competent caregivers to foster and adopt youth in the child welfare system.
- ACS convened its **first conference on well-being** and received \$3.75 million in federal grants to further juvenile justice and child welfare work
- **Foster Youth College Success Initiative.** Received \$1.5 million in state funds to provide concrete supports for foster youth to succeed in college. (May 2015)

Administrative data show that, in both NYC and LAC, the number of TAY choosing to remain in the child welfare system continues to increase. This steady increase is due to policy changes in both jurisdictions. And while these policy changes are intended to improve outcomes for TAY, there are still issues that require further attention. For example, TAY continue to experience some level of placement instability; however, both jurisdictions continue efforts to understand which placement types work best for foster youth to stabilize placements for them.

System Change through Cross-sector Coordination

Social network analysis (SNA) was implemented to assess the “reach” of the FYSI in building new and strengthening existing relationships between grantees and non-grantee organizations and agencies. Social network analysis uncovered several important findings, namely:

- Organizations are clearly working together in a large, interconnected, **network of collaborative relationships.**

- The network is **not completely connected** – there is at least one very small group of organizations working together apart from the rest of the network.
- There are several organizations acting as “**gatekeepers.**” These are the organizations that branch out from the “core” and link the other parts of the network to the larger network. In SNA, gatekeepers serve as **intermediaries or bridges** between portions of the network and play an important role in maintaining the network structure; without them, the network falls apart.
- The **overall number** of partner organizations and **connections between and among them** increased after FYSI implementation; this demonstrates the role FYSI has played in forging connections between grantee and non-grantee agencies and organizations over time.

These findings suggest that LAC and NYC grantees are connected to each other and identified partner agencies, but in some cases, are connected in different ways. The next step in the SNA, which is scheduled to take place in fall 2015, will use quantitative metrics (e.g., density, centrality, and subgroup characteristics) to tell us more about the functional aspects of the network and help parse out some of the reasons for the differences across jurisdictions.

Shared Knowledge and Leveraged Funding

As part of the evaluation, data are collected on leveraged funding and dissemination activities for a specified period of time; for this report, data were reported for activities conducted from April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2015. Leveraged funding data provides the Foundation with a quantitative measure by which to assess the impact of FYSI funding on grantee organizations. Data on dissemination activities are reported for five areas: 1) presentations, 2) publications in the press, print or online, 3) media citations of Foundation-related work, 4) multimedia products developed, and 5) curricula, created or revised. Findings show that grantees excel in these areas:

- Grantees continue building and disseminating new knowledge, conducting 258 presentations, producing 73 publications, and reporting 692 media citations.
- Grantees have leveraged \$8,340,394 in private funding and \$1,754,618 in public funding to support their work. Taken together, private funds leveraged in the previous and current year of the initiative is \$21 million, already more than the \$20 million goal. With one year left in the initiative, grantees will continue to exceed the \$20 million goal.

Recommendations

As noted throughout this report, in recent years, there has been considerable movement at both the policy and program level around issues affecting TAY and foster care youth.

Much of this change has been initiated by Foundation grantees. Policies and programs have been developed that are now being implemented and much needed modifications are being made to programs to better meet the needs of TAY and foster youth. But there comes a time when we must understand the effects of such changes so that we can be confident they are producing the outcomes we expect. To this end, we recommend the child welfare field turn its attention to research and evaluation that can help us understand what is working for TAY and what is not. Specifically, we recommend the Foundation and child welfare community continue to:

- Promote evaluation and research focused on understanding the effects of policy and programmatic changes and advancements on youth outcomes; such research would go a long way in helping the field understand how best to meet the needs of TAY and other foster youth
- Encourage efforts to build an infrastructure for educational data that can be used in research and evaluation to better understand educational outcomes for TAY and other foster youth
- Support grantees and others to build and disseminate new knowledge to inform the field and contribute to the evidence base about what works to support TAY to successfully transition out of the child welfare system and into productive and successful lives.