

June 2020

Foster Youth Strategic Initiative 2019 Evaluation Report

Prepared for the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation by Child Trends with strategic consultants at Action Research and Janis Spire

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Progress towards the Initiative's Objectives.....	5
Key findings across the Initiative's areas of focus.....	12
Recommendations for the Initiative.....	15
Appendix: Grantee List	17

This report reflects events and activities that occurred throughout 2019. Child Trends continues to gather information on subsequent events that will be presented in the 2020 annual report.

This publication/presentation was supported by grant #17306 from the Hilton Foundation. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of Child Trends, Incorporated. Child Trends, Incorporated makes no guarantees, warranties, or assurances of any kind, express or implied, with respect to such information, including any information on linked sites and including, but not limited to, accuracy of the information or its completeness, timeliness, usefulness, adequacy, continued availability, or ownership.

Child Trends grants the right to share or adapt this report upon proper citation. Copyright Child Trends 2020

Introduction

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation’s Foster Youth Strategic Initiative (the Initiative) aims to ensure that older youth in foster care in Los Angeles County (LA) and New York City (NYC) become self-sufficient and thriving adults. The Initiative equips transition age foster youth (foster TAY) ages 16 to 24 for career and college success.

To help foster youth achieve positive educational and career outcomes, the Initiative’s grantees provide a continuum of supports designed to help all foster TAY gain the skills and supports they need to thrive. Grantees also provide targeted supports for youth who have historically faced greater challenges, including expectant and parenting foster youth and foster youth who cross over into the juvenile justice system. Across all its work, the Initiative promotes greater alignment and coordination between TAY-serving systems. This report summarizes some of the major accomplishments, challenges, and lessons learned from the Initiative in 2019.

The Initiative reaches an estimated 21,100 transition age foster youth in LA and NYC¹

- 14,800 current and former foster youth ages 16-24 live in LA²
- 6,300 current and former foster youth ages 16-24 live in NYC³

Profile of 2019 grantees

44 grantees funded by the Initiative in 2019 collectively received \$11.2 million from the Initiative. Since 2012, the Initiative has invested a total of \$75.6 million.

- 16 grantees are working in NYC
- 17 grantees are working in LA
- 11 grantees are working across both jurisdictions

- 23 grantees aim to advance innovative programs
- 21 grantees aim to strengthen systems and policy
- 12 grantees aim to expand and share knowledge

For a list of grantees by location and area(s) of focus, see Appendix. Grantee names are **bolded in blue** throughout this report.

¹ The Initiative’s investments in system reform efforts seek to improve the lives of all foster TAY living in LA and NYC; therefore, this estimate includes current and former foster youth ages 16-24 as of July 1, 2019 in LA and NYC.

² LA youth in care as of July 1, 2019, rounded to the nearest hundred. Includes youth in foster care who are supervised under the probation system. Source: Webster, D., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., ..., Gonzalez, A. (2019). *CCWIP reports*. Retrieved from University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare. Former foster youth ages 16-24 on July 1, 2019 in LA rounded to the nearest hundred. Source: CWS/CMS Datamart as of October 27, 2019 provided by the LA Department of Children and Family Services.

³ NYC youth in care ages 16-20 as of July 1, 2019, rounded to the nearest hundred. Excludes youth placed at the Children’s Center and youth in care for less than eight days. Former foster youth counts include youth ages 16-24 who were in foster care on or after their 16th birthday and were in care for at least eight days, by age on July 1, 2019. 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 October 30, 2019 provided by New York City Administration for Children’s Services.

Methodology

In 2018, Child Trends became the Initiative's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) partner. In partnership with the Foundation and key consultants, we developed an evaluation strategy to track progress toward the Initiative's goals, understand the contributions of the Foundation and its grantees, and identify opportunities to continue collective progress. The MEL team facilitates continuous learning, supports the incorporation of evaluation findings into the strategy, and disseminates learning in LA and NYC and to the broader child welfare field.

To systematically explore the Initiative's progress and future opportunities in LA and NYC, we assessed several types of information from October 2018 through September 2019:

1. Administrative and survey data collected and reported by public agencies⁴
2. Public documents, including government agency reports, research conducted by independent organizations, academic literature, policy documents, advocacy reports, webinars, press releases, and news reports
3. Interviews with stakeholders, including public agency executives and staff
4. A focus group with transition age youth
5. Interviews and information provided by grantees, including progress reports, interviews with grantee executives and staff, a grantee survey, and grantee publications

⁴ The data included in this report were published or provided to Child Trends in 2019. Prior to publication, several data sources have released new data (e.g., for the 2018-2019 school year). These data will be reported in our 2020 Evaluation Report.

Spotlight on Significant Developments in 2019

Building on the strong foundation laid throughout the first and second phases of the Initiative, 2019 saw substantial gains in the systems and programs that support youth in foster care in LA and NYC. The work of the Initiative—through its investments, the efforts of its staff and grantees, and its role as a connector and convener—spurred key gains that were realized this year:

Fair Futures, a \$10 million public investment, **has the potential to transform the programmatic landscape for foster youth in NYC**. The investment will provide intensive, individualized coaching to help foster youth navigate education, employment, and other resources on their path to self-sufficiency. The Initiative has been an instrumental player in this advancement through its advocacy, programmatic work, and knowledge building. It will continue to work with partners to reach the goal of \$50 million in public funding for Fair Futures. We do not know of any other initiative of this size, scope, and duration in this sector, either past or present.

The Initiative's work has also helped keep foster youth connected to families—an essential support to healthy development and growth. As states across the country struggle to place youth in homes, **an increased number of foster youth ages 14-17 in LA are living in stable family placements**, including with kin, and caregivers are receiving funding and supports to promote youth well-being. NYC has prioritized family-based placement for foster youth and **advanced innovative strategies for foster parent recruitment and retention** through its Home Away from Home Initiative. Other jurisdictions are looking to NYC as a model in this work.

Both jurisdictions saw a wealth of new strategies for supporting the educational success of youth in foster care. School districts in LA are signing agreements with the child welfare agency to share the costs of transportation to **keep foster youth at their school of origin** when placements change. Also in LA, **the percentage of high school seniors in foster care applying for financial aid nearly doubled from 2018 to 2019**, as stakeholders continued to mobilize around supporting foster youth to complete financial aid applications. New evidence underscores the importance of the Initiative's postsecondary investments, finding that foster youth's access to financial aid and campus support programs enhances their postsecondary persistence.

The Initiative **continues to advance the collection and use of high-quality data** to drive decision making for youth in foster care. It convenes leaders, elevates the need for stronger data, and invests in work to fill data gaps and linkages. For example, through a new grant in NYC, the Initiative is funding new data linkages to answer key questions about foster youth's educational and employment experiences. And the data can tell a powerful story: In NYC, new data from the child welfare agency **show a dramatic decline in the number of foster youth becoming young parents or crossing over into the juvenile justice system**.

Progress Toward the Initiative’s Objectives

Currently in its second phase (2017–2022), the Initiative focuses on three objectives, with corresponding goals and expected results, to help foster TAY achieve career and college success. Below, we describe major areas of accomplishments and progress toward the Initiative’s expected results in 2019 across the three objectives:

1. Advance innovative foster TAY programs.
2. Strengthen systems and policy for foster youth.
3. Expand and share knowledge with the field.

Objective 1: Advance innovative foster TAY programs.

The Initiative continues to provide young people with a range of innovative programs **designed to help foster youth achieve their educational and employment goals**. Combined with the Initiative’s investments in reforming systems and building knowledge, these direct interventions with individual youth help improve educational and employment outcomes for foster youth.

Progress toward Objective 1 2022 results

Foster TAY will have access to the supports, education, and career pathways they need to become self-sufficient and thrive.	
2022 Expected Results ⁵	Progress Update
70% of foster TAY will graduate high school on time (within 4 years of entering)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In LA, 51 percent of foster youth graduated within four years in the 2017–2018 school year, marking an increase from 47 percent in the prior year.⁶ • NYC has not yet produced comprehensive data on foster youth graduation rates.

⁵ In 2019, the Initiative and MEL team reviewed historical data and refined the original Phase II expected results. No single indicator fully reflects a young person’s experience, and the MEL team recommends that each of these indicators be interpreted in the context of related indicators and information.

⁶ Among students who entered high school in 2012-2013. Source: California Department of Education. (n.d.) *2016-17 Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Outcome: Los Angeles County Report*. Retrieved from <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/CohOutcome.aspx?agglevel=county&year=2016-17&cds=19&ro=y> & Among students who entered high school in 2013-2014. Source: California Department of Education. (n.d.) *2017-2018 Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Outcome: Los Angeles County Report*. Retrieved from <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/CohOutcome.aspx?cde=19&agglevel=County&year=2017-18&initrow=&ro=y>

Foster TAY will have access to the supports, education, and career pathways they need to become self-sufficient and thrive.

2022 Expected Results ⁵	Progress Update
90% of foster TAY will remain in their school of origin 90 days after placement change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LA does not report school stability for foster youth. While not LA-specific, foster youth in a California sample attended an average of 2.55 schools during their time in grades 9–12, compared to an average of 1.25 schools for their peers who were not in foster care.⁷ While measured differently than the Initiative’s metric on school stability, these data illustrate that foster youth in California are more likely than their peers to experience school instability in high school. • NYC reported school stability data for children of <u>all ages</u> in foster care during the 2017–2018 school year: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 73 percent remained in their school of origin 90 days after initial placement, compared to 72 percent in the 2016–2017 school year. ○ 80 percent remained in their school of origin 90 days after placement change, compared to 77 percent in the 2016–2017 school year.⁸
% of eligible foster TAY enrolled in postsecondary education program (2-year, 4-year programs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within 12 months of high school graduation, 45 percent of foster youth who graduate from high school in LA enroll in postsecondary education, compared to 62 percent of all graduating students.⁹ These data are newly reported this year and will serve as a baseline moving forward. • From 2017 to 2018, college enrollment in NYC rose from 11 percent to 14 percent for foster youth ages 18–20 <u>in care</u> and from 10 percent to 15 percent for <u>youth aging out of care</u>.¹⁰ These figures apply to a different population of youth in NYC and should not be compared to data from LA.

⁷ Education Results Partnership & California College Pathways (2019). *Pipeline to Success: Supporting California Foster Youth from High School to Community College*. Retrieved from <https://www.jbaforyouth.org/erpfosteryouthreport/>

⁸ New York City Administration for Children’s Services. (n.d.). *High School Graduation Rates of Youth in Foster Care Annual Report 2017*. & New York City Administration for Children’s Services. (n.d.). *Educational Continuity of Children in Foster Care (School Year 2017-2018)*. Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2018/citycouncilreport.pdf>.

⁹ California Department of Education. (n.d.) *2017-18 College-Going Rate for California High School Students by Postsecondary Institution Type*. Retrieved from <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/DQCensus/CGR.aspx?agglevel=County&cds=19&year=2017-18>.

¹⁰ Among other data sources, this report uses Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA) data, which are youth- or caseworker-reported and not verified, along with more reliable administrative data. These data should be interpreted with caution. Sources: New York City Administration for Children’s Services. (2018). *Report on Youth in Foster Care*. Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2018/ReportOnYouthInFC2018.pdf>. New York City Administration for Children’s Services. (2017). *Report on Youth in Foster Care*. Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2017/YouthInFosterCare2017.pdf>

Foster TAY will have access to the supports, education, and career pathways they need to become self-sufficient and thrive.

2022 Expected Results ⁵	Progress Update
% of eligible foster TAY who complete postsecondary education (2-year, 4-year programs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 percent of current or former foster youth who enrolled in an LA community college in the 2012–2013 school year received a certificate, earned an associate’s degree, or transferred to a four-year institution within five years of enrollment.¹¹ • Postsecondary completion data are not available for NYC.
LA and NYC will develop mechanisms to track and report foster TAY employment rates through age 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While both LA and NYC continue to bolster workforce development opportunities for foster TAY, neither community reports comprehensive employment data. Bright spots in 2019 include newly reported data on foster youth referred to and served by LA’s public workforce training and subsidized employment programs and an increase in the percentage of foster youth in NYC who report receiving employment supports.¹² Of the over 1,000 current and former foster youth enrolled in public workforce services, 65 percent completed 20 hours of training and 26 percent completed 100 or more hours of services.¹³ • At the time of exit from foster care, 49 percent of foster TAY in LA who exited care in 2018 had obtained employment, compared to 51 percent of youth exiting care in 2017.¹⁴ In 2018, 25 percent of foster TAY exiting care in NYC had a verifiable source of income, compared to 32 percent of foster TAY exiting care in 2017.¹⁵ Of note, these data are generated using different methodologies in each jurisdiction and therefore cannot be compared. More comprehensive data are

¹¹ Outcomes within six years of enrollment is a more common indicator, which will be available next year. Source: Cal-PASS Plus database as of September 10, 2019 provided by John Burton Advocates for Youth.

¹² New York City Administration for Children’s Services. (2019). *Youth Experience Survey 2019*. Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2019/FY19YouthExperienceSurveyFINAL51519BB.pdf> & New York City Administration for Children’s Services. (2018). *Youth Experience Survey 2018*. Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2018/ACSYouthExperienceSurveyMay152018.pdf>

¹³ Service hours are recorded when a youth exits services, so foster youth who are still participating in services are not counted in the total who completed 100+ hours of services. Data are not available on youth served through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Additionally, data are not available on the reason why youth exit services. Source: Los Angeles County Department of Workforce, Development, Aging, and Community Services. (2019). *Data Report*. Opportunity Youth Collaborative, email correspondence (August 31, 2019).

¹⁴ Among youth whose whereabouts were known at the time of discharge. Includes youth exiting care of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) as well as crossover youth exiting care of the Department of Probation. Source: Webster, D., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., ..., Gonzalez, A. (2019). *CCWIP reports*. Retrieved from University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare.

¹⁵ Among other data sources, this report uses Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA) data which are youth- or caseworker-reported and not verified, along with more reliable administrative data. These data should be interpreted with caution. Sources: New York City Administration for Children’s Services. (2018). *Report on Youth in Foster Care*. Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2018/ReportOnYouthInFC2018.pdf>. & New York City Administration for Children’s Services. (2017). *Report on Youth in Foster Care*. Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2017/YouthInFosterCare2017.pdf>.

Foster TAY will have access to the supports, education, and career pathways they need to become self-sufficient and thrive.

2022 Expected Results ⁵	Progress Update
	needed to fully understand employment trends, given limitations to both measures.
75% of foster TAY ages 14–17 living in family foster care placements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The percent of foster youth living in families in LA has increased from 60 percent in 2017, when California implemented Continuum of Care Reform (CCR), to 69 percent in 2019.¹⁶ CCR is California’s comprehensive policy reform to ensure that children live with families. • The percent of foster youth ages 14–17 living in family-based placement in NYC remained steady at 72 percent from 2018 to 2019.¹⁷

Objective 2: Strengthen systems and policy for foster youth.

In 2019, the Initiative and its grantees **facilitated substantial positive changes** to the systems and policies that impact the lives of foster youth. These systems play critical roles in the lives and long-term outcomes of foster youth, determining where a young person lives, what supports they receive to keep them healthy and connected to school, and what education and employment opportunities are available to them. With the support of the Initiative, both LA and NYC **have new policies that strengthen how staff respond** to foster youth’s needs and better support their development. Both jurisdictions **saw sizeable financial investments in foster youth** with major public initiatives commencing in 2019.

¹⁶ Among foster youth in care on July 1st of each year. Family-based placements include pre-adoptive, relative/NREFM, foster, FFA, guardian-dependent, and guardian-independent, and trial home visit. Source: Webster, D., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., ..., Morris, N. (2019). *CCWIP reports*. Retrieved from University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare.

¹⁷ Includes youth in foster home placement and youth in kinship care. New York State’s CCRS and CNX database as of October 30, 2019 provided by New York City Administration for Children’s Services.

Progress toward Objective 2 2022 results

A strong system and policy framework will be in place to enable all TAY to become self-sufficient, reinforced by effective advocacy, and strong public and private investments	
2022 Expected Results	Progress Update
Public child welfare, education, juvenile justice, workforce development, and public health agencies will coordinate service delivery and align funding to improve foster TAY outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grantees and system stakeholders in both LA and NYC have developed several mechanisms to improve cross-system coordination as multiple agencies work together to develop and implement policies and initiatives that support foster youth. • LA’s child welfare, workforce, education, and probation systems committed to establishing a continuum of integrated workforce and education services to achieve specified goals for foster youth (e.g., by age 18, foster youth will complete 300 hours of work experience); adopted a standardized, trauma-informed work readiness curriculum; and unveiled a new universal referral process to streamline the connection of foster youth to workforce services. The Opportunity Youth Collaborative (OYC) partners played a key role in helping to broker these agreements. • Education and child welfare stakeholders in LA concluded their three-year pilot school stability transportation program, culminating in a long-term transportation plan and cost-sharing agreement between the child welfare agency and individual school districts to keep youth in their school of origin. • The LA Reproductive Health Equity Project for Foster Youth (LA RHEP) engages public agency partners, grantees, and youth in a collective impact initiative to increase access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and services for foster youth. LA RHEP supported policy, spearheaded cross-sector implementation, and developed training curricula and fact sheets for caregivers, caseworkers, judges, health care providers, and youth. • NYC’s new Fair Futures initiative is comprised of a broad coalition of provider agencies, nonprofits, foundations, young people, and other supporters in NYC (including the Hilton Foundation and many grantees) that successfully secured \$10 million in public funding to provide individualized coaching in education, employment, housing, and health to foster youth as they transition to adulthood. • NYC’s Interagency Foster Care Task Force, comprised of stakeholders representing youth, families, and a variety of public and private agencies, monitored the implementation of its recommendations this year. The

A strong system and policy framework will be in place to enable all TAY to become self-sufficient, reinforced by effective advocacy, and strong public and private investments

2022 Expected Results	Progress Update
	Taskforce released a report in March 2019 on its progress. Several recommendations relate directly to older youth in and exiting foster care.
Advocacy capacity will be expanded to promote and ensure the effective implementation of TAY-focused system and policy reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Initiative was involved in significant advocacy wins in both LA and NYC in 2019. For example, California legislators allocated \$15 million for the new Family Urgent Response System (FURS) in the 2019–2020 budget. This bill was co-sponsored by Children Now and supported by several Initiative grantees. FURS will support foster families and youth through a statewide hotline and county-based in-person mobile response team when crisis situations erupt, strengthening family-based placement stability. This funding adds to an estimated \$880 million in state investments made to increase support to caregivers in the last three years. To support foster youths’ postsecondary success, California legislators passed new legislation to make the timelines and requirements for accessing financial aid more accommodating for foster youth. • In NYC, the Initiative made new investments in grantees to support advocacy for new policies and system reforms. For example, Children’s Village and other partners championed for New York State to allocate \$3 million to reduce the use of residential care, and grantees (including the Juvenile Law Center and Advocates for Children) are providing technical assistance to child welfare and education agencies to support educational stability and success.
\$60 million in new public funding and \$30 million in private funding will be leveraged for foster TAY programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative funding serves as a catalyst for public and private investments in foster TAY. Since the beginning of Phase II (April 2017 to December 2018), grantees leveraged a total of \$37.5 million in public funding and \$17.6 million in private funding.¹⁸ • In addition to new public investments through Fair Futures, several grantees expanded their services with new public funding, including Friends of the Children, Children’s Law Center, iFoster, and First Star.

Objective 3: Expand and share knowledge with the field.

The child welfare field has significant research and data gaps, making it difficult to accurately illustrate the needs of youth in foster care and identify which policies and programs best set these

¹⁸ Leveraged funding is defined as the use of one source of funding (Hilton Foundation) to attract the commitment of funds from other sources for the project that is part of the Foster Youth Strategic Initiative.

youth on a trajectory for educational and employment success. The Initiative has long supported grantees in producing **critical new research** that informs local and national policy and programmatic discussions. This year, the Initiative **shared major findings** around postsecondary persistence, funded the development of **essential infrastructure** for the ongoing collection and sharing of data, and challenged grantees to **prioritize data in new ways**.

Progress toward Objective 3 2022 results

A robust pipeline of foster TAY-focused research will be established to inform and guide the development of strong policy and practice.	
2022 Expected Results	Progress Update
Collection of critical data will be expanded to address existing gaps in order to build a more complete understanding of foster TAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the efforts of the Initiative, grantees, and stakeholders, new publicly available data were produced in 2019 in the postsecondary, employment, and focused interventions issue areas, with the prospect of additional data next year. For example, data are now available for LA on the college enrollment rates within 12 months of high school graduation, foster youth participation in workforce services, and number of parenting foster youth. With these data, the Initiative and its partners can better understand how youth are faring and track youth progress over time. • The Initiative’s knowledge grantees (e.g., Children’s Data Network and California Child Welfare Indicators Project) partner with public agency stakeholders to analyze and report data, filling identified data gaps. • The MEL team facilitated conversations with grantees in NYC and LA to identify data priorities in each community. A list of indicators prioritized by grantees in NYC was shared with the child welfare agency in NYC and the Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI), a branch of the New York City Mayor’s Office.
A comprehensive cross-sector data strategy will enable all relevant foster TAY-serving agencies to share administrative data and measure progress toward self-sufficiency	<p>The Initiative and its grantees support cross-agency data sharing and analysis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the Initiative’s support, CIDI will link data across the child welfare, education, and employment systems to understand better the experiences of youth in foster care and their outcomes. Knowledge grantees in California continue to link and report data and build public agencies’ capacity for data integration. • Grantees are supporting the development and use of integrated data systems such as the Education Passport System to share data between child welfare, probation, and school partners in LA; the Cal-PASS Plus data system that can be used by school districts and colleges to track postsecondary progress for their students; and the new Fair Futures data platform being developed in NYC to collect youth-level service and outcome data.

A robust pipeline of foster TAY-focused research will be established to inform and guide the development of strong policy and practice.

2022 Expected Results	Progress Update
<p>Targeted research will be conducted and broadly disseminated to increase the knowledge and evidence base to improve foster TAY outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New research from knowledge grantees highlights that system reform efforts supported by the Initiative and its grantees are positively impacting foster youth. Preliminary findings from the University of Chicago's CalYOUTH study suggest that receiving financial aid and participating in campus-based support services increases the odds of foster youth's postsecondary persistence.¹⁹ Another study identified several factors that contribute to foster youth earning more credits and a higher GPA during their first year in community college, including receipt of financial aid and counseling/advisement services.²⁰ • Grantees continue to raise awareness among the general public about the lives and experiences of foster TAY. In spring 2019, HBO premiered the Initiative-supported documentary <i>Foster</i>, which has been screened widely to raise awareness of the experiences of youth, families, and professionals involved in the child welfare system and aid in foster family recruitment efforts.

Key Findings Across the Initiative's Areas of Focus

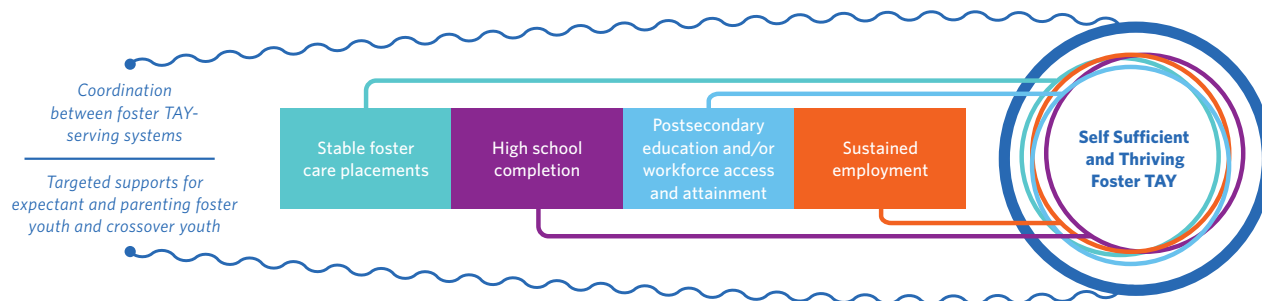
Grantees continue to innovate and show progress across each focus area.

In addition to assessing progress toward the Initiative's three objectives and 2022 expected results, the MEL team's evaluation strategy includes a close examination of six key areas of focus for the Initiative, depicted in Figure 1 below.

¹⁹ Okpych, N. (2019, October). Findings from the CalYOUTH Study. Presented at Blueprint for Success Conference. Los Angeles, CA.

²⁰ Financial aid includes student support grants and Pell Grants. Concurrent enrollment in high school and community college and developing an educational plan were also associated with first-year success. Source: Education Results Partnership & California College Pathways (2019). *Pipeline to Success: Supporting California Foster Youth from High School to Community College*. Retrieved from <https://www.jbaforyouth.org/erpfosteryouthreport/>.

Figure 1. Initiative's strategic approach



Source: Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

Both communities experienced impressive gains in each area as grantees worked to improve the lives and outcomes of foster youth. Our report highlights this work, including **data on how foster youth are faring**, in profiles that tie together the programmatic, system reform, and knowledge building efforts described above in the following areas of focus:

- [Education](#)
- [Postsecondary education](#)
- [Employment](#)
- [Placement](#)
- [Focused Interventions for expectant and parenting foster youth and crossover youth](#)
- [Cross-system coordination](#)

The Initiative, grantees, and stakeholders have mobilized around data in new and exciting ways, yet data gaps persist.

While progress continues, the remaining gaps in data on foster youth in LA and NYC are significant. Without timely and high-quality information, decision makers are unable to understand the existing challenges and the long-term outcomes of foster youth, or what programs and policies best support them. **As in past years, the Initiative has played a key role in promoting data collection and use, as well as investing in specific data initiatives.** From 2018 to 2019, we observed an improved ability by foster youth-serving systems in LA and NYC to gather and report more and better data.

- **The Initiative** refined its list of key indicators used to understand the youth-level impacts of its investments in systems, programs, and research (see “Expected Results” for Objective 1 above). These indicators can inform discussions in both communities on data priorities.
- **Grantees** have long focused on data in their work and began important collaborative conversations on data needs in 2019. Grantees in NYC initiated a series of meetings, facilitated by the MEL team, to identify the indicators they would like to see gathered and reported in their community across the Initiative’s issue areas. The MEL team facilitated a similar discussion in LA.

- **Stakeholders** in LA and NYC continue to expand their data reporting and were responsive to data requests from the MEL team. For example, new data are now publicly available in California on the number of parenting foster youth, and LA stakeholders are reporting new data on the number of foster youth served by public workforce services. Further, LA and NYC's child welfare systems both provided data to the MEL team that are incorporated throughout this report.

While much work is underway to expand data capacity and reporting, **many challenges persist**, including:

- **Time-bound data linkages and reporting of administrative data:** Reliably identifying current or former foster youth in education, postsecondary, and employment data systems requires linking these systems with information from the child welfare data system. While Initiative-funded research projects provide essential data for understanding foster youth experiences and outcomes, data reporting is limited to the length and scope of these research projects.
- **Inconsistent and limited use of available data:** Although service providers and frontline agency staff in LA and NYC have access to more information on the foster youth they serve, newer data systems such as the Education Passport System in LA are still not regularly utilized by social workers to communicate timely information with school district staff on individual foster youth. In NYC, the child welfare agency's education team recognizes the need to support provider agencies in analyzing and using the education data they receive for youth in their care and plans to provide technical assistance as their staffing capacity expands.
- **Lack of outcome data, particularly for postsecondary and employment outcomes:** Notable gaps remain in outcome data for current and former foster youth, including school stability data in LA, high school graduation rates in NYC, postsecondary enrollment data in NYC, postsecondary completion data in LA and NYC, and employment data in LA and NYC.

Foundation as a change agent

Grantees report that long after project completion, the Hilton Foundation's investment in research continues to inform priorities in the field.

In complex policy environments, the Hilton Foundation's support is credited with ensuring that advocates—who strive for better policy and meaningful collaboration across stakeholders—have the resources to plan and prioritize targeted support to agency leaders and staff to implement policies that will result in lasting changes to practice.

The Foundation's convenings present valuable learning opportunities for grantees and partners in LA and NYC to learn from one another.

The Hilton Foundation's sustained investment continues to elevate the focus on foster youth in LA and NYC, with ripple effects extending beyond these communities.

We conducted interviews throughout 2019 with key stakeholders and grantees in LA and NYC. Throughout these conversations, **interviewees elevated the Foundation's critically important role** in supporting youth in foster care, via the following:

- **Providing dedicated resources to support policy implementation.** In recent years, LA and NYC have made significant policy changes to better support foster youth, but these policies have the potential to fall short of their goals in the absence of targeted implementation support. Funding from the Initiative is credited with enabling advocates to identify and

address implementation challenges. For example, advocacy organizations supported by the Initiative have developed toolkits and training resources, partnered with public agencies to educate frontline staff on new policy requirements, drafted regulatory language, and monitored implementation to propose further policy refinement to address identified challenges.

- **Raising the profile of innovative programs, leading to program expansion through public funding.** In both LA and NYC, Initiative-funded programs have gained stakeholder attention, leading to outside investments and expansion. Grantees leveraged over \$55 million in public and private funds from April 2017 to December 2018.¹ This reach expands beyond the LA and NYC communities, with programs such as [First Star](#) expanding in a new jurisdiction with state and philanthropic funding, and other jurisdictions learning from the innovative approaches for foster parent recruitment and retention developed through [Home Away from Home](#).
- **Generating new knowledge used nationwide to strengthen the systems and programs serving foster youth.** The Initiative remains at the forefront of supporting innovative research and data projects. The data being produced and used in LA and NYC to guide decision making continues to grow as a result of grantees' advocacy and the Initiative's investments. Other jurisdictions and national partners look to findings from the research (e.g., the [University of Chicago's](#) CaYOUTH study) to better understand and meet the needs of foster youth nationwide.

Recommendations for the Initiative

The Initiative and its grantees built on their history of supporting youth in foster care with exciting new developments in 2019. Considering the progress made and opportunities highlighted throughout this report, we encourage the Initiative to:

1. **Continue to convene stakeholders in LA and NYC and share lessons learned across both communities and with the broader field.** The Foundation is viewed as a critical player in the foster TAY arena in LA and NYC and should continue to bring partners together to promote collaboration toward shared goals. We encourage the Initiative to spotlight replicable approaches and lessons learned, such as through case studies or webinars. Efforts to elevate could include NYC's [Fair Futures](#) and [Home Away from Home's](#) initiatives, collective impact efforts such as [LA Reproductive Health Equity Project](#) and [Opportunity Youth Collaborative's](#) success in building cross-agency partnerships, and best practices for positively shifting the narrative around foster care.
2. **Maintain emphasis on high-quality policy and program implementation** as LA and NYC work to fill critical gaps for foster TAY. Policy enactment is only the first step toward change—ensuring that policies are fully implemented and that progress is measured are key to reaching the intended goals. The Initiative's continued leadership in this area may include opportunities such as supporting implementation of LA's school stability policy and building a strong foundation for the implementation of [Fair Futures](#) in NYC.
3. **Sustain momentum around the creation of regularly reported, high-quality data in LA and NYC.** Many priority indicators needed to monitor incremental and long-term outcomes for

¹ Leveraged funding is defined as using one source of funding (Hilton Foundation) to attract the commitment of funds from other sources for the project that is part of the Foster Youth Strategic Initiative.

foster youth are not currently reported for the entire population of foster youth. We encourage the Initiative to continue engaging public agency stakeholders around new data collection and reporting strategies. As more data become available, we also recommend that the Initiative use this information to further refine its existing targets for each community. The availability of more data disaggregated by race/ethnicity presents an important opportunity to embed a racial and ethnic equity lens throughout the MEL team's evaluation process. By identifying, exploring, and understanding factors that contribute to disparate outcomes for foster youth of color, we can inform the Initiative's strategy.

Appendix: Grantee List

Hilton grantees are categorized below based on their location and the focus of their Hilton grant. Many grantees work across multiple areas of focus outside of their Hilton-funded projects.

	Systems/ Policy	Program	Knowledge
Los Angeles			
Children Now	•		
Children's Law Center of California	•	•	
Coalition for Responsible Community Development		•	
First Place for Youth		•	
John Burton Advocates for Youth	•		
KCETLink	•	•	•
Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation	•		
National Center for Youth Law - FosterEd	•	•	
National Center for Youth Law - Reproductive Health	•		
Public Counsel	•	•	
Raise a Child		•	
Southern California Grantmakers	•		
The Alliance for Children's Rights (Opportunity Youth Collaborative)	•	•	
United Friends of the Children		•	
University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration (CaYOUTH)			•
University of California at Berkeley School of Social Welfare (California Child Welfare Indicators Project)			•
USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work (Children's Data Network)			•

	Systems/ Policy	Program	Knowledge
New York City			
Advocates for Children of NY, Inc.	•		
Children's Aid Society	•	•	
Cornell University			•
Fostering Media Connections			•
Fund for Public Health in New York, Inc. (Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Adolescent Health Unit)	•	•	
Good Shepherd Services		•	
Heartshare St. Vincent's Services, Inc.		•	
Graham-Windham		•	
Juvenile Law Center	•		
New York Community Trust (Fair Futures)		•	
New Yorkers for Children (Home Away from Home)	•		
Research Foundation of the City University of New York	•	•	•
The Children's Village	•	•	
The Door - A Center of Alternatives, Inc.		•	
The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City (Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence)			•
The New York Foundling		•	
Dual Location			
First Star Inc.		•	
Frameworks Institute			•
Friends of the Children		•	
iFoster		•	
One Degree			•
Power to Decide	•		
StoryCorps			•
The Aspen Institute	•		
The Forum for Youth Investment	•		
Tides Center			•
Vera Institute for Justice	•	•	