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Foster Youth Strategic Initiative 2020 Evaluation Report

Prepared for the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation by Child Trends
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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 or foster youth) 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 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 foster TAY-serving systems.

> **The Initiative reaches an estimated 21,100 transition-age foster youth in LA and NYC[1]**
>
> - 14,500 current and former foster youth ages 16-24 live in LA[2]
> - 6,100 current and former foster youth ages 16-24 live in NYC[3]

This report summarizes progress made toward the Initiative's objectives in 2020, while considering the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the lives of young people, their families, and the systems and stakeholders that support them. Although the Initiative has maintained its commitment to its goals and strategies, the pandemic has affected the ways the Initiative and grantees approach each objective and issue area as detailed throughout this report. The Initiative has rapidly responded to the urgent needs of transition-age youth (e.g., through tutoring supports and direct emergency funds to youth and families) while staying the course in its priorities.

This report also marks the end of Phase II of the Initiative, as the Foundation prepares to double its grantmaking through a portfolio of five-year strategic initiatives beginning in January 2021. In this next phase of work, referred to as Strategy25, the Initiative will deepen and expand existing efforts with new areas of focus related to housing and mental health services for foster youth, youth who have experienced or are at risk of commercial sexual exploitation, and national field building. The Initiative is committed to centering the voices of youth in foster care in its work and supporting anti-racist policies and practices across its portfolio.

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[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, 2020 in LA and NYC.

[2] LA youth in care as of July 1, 2020, 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., ..., Briones, E. (2020). *CCWIP reports*. https://ccwip.berkeley.edu/. Former foster youth counts include youth who were in foster care on or after their 16th birthday for at least eight days and were not in care on July 1, 2020, by age (ages 16-24) on July 1, 2020. Rounded to the nearest hundred. Source: CWS/CMS Datamart as of October 13, 2020 provided by the LA Department of Children and Family Services.

[3] NYC youth in care ages 16-20 as of July 1, 2020, rounded to the nearest hundred. Excludes youth whose entry reason is juvenile delinquency and youth in care for less than eight days. Former foster youth counts include youth who were in foster care on or after their 16th birthday for at least eight days and were not in care on July 1, 2020, by age (ages 16-24) on July 1, 2020. 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 27, 2020 provided by New York City Administration for Children's Services. Youth who remain in placement after they turn 21 years old until they have a suitable housing plan are not in CCRS or CNNX.

Grantmaking in 2020

Fifty grantees collectively received $14.4 million from the Initiative in 2020, including $3 million specifically in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2012, the Initiative has invested a total of $89.8 million to help foster TAY in LA and NYC become self-sufficient and thriving adults.

Methodology

In 2018, Child Trends became the Initiative's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) partner. In partnership with the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation (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 incorporating evaluation findings into the strategy, and disseminates learning in LA and NYC and to the broader child welfare field.

The MEL team systematically explored the Initiative's progress and future opportunities in LA and NYC across six issue areas: (1) education, (2) postsecondary education, (3) employment, (4) placement, (5) focused interventions, and (6) cross-system coordination. We assessed the following information gathered between October 2019 and September 2020:

1. Administrative and survey data collected and reported by public agencies[4]

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. Focus groups with and information provided by grantees, including progress reports, focus groups with grantee executives and staff, and grantee publications

This report draws on data gathered from the following grantees:[5]

- **16** grantees working in NYC
- **16** grantees working in LA
- **10** grantees working across both jurisdictions

- **18** grantees aiming to advance innovative programs
- **23** grantees aiming to strengthen systems and policy
- **11** grantees aiming to expand and share knowledge

A list of grantees by location and area(s) of focus is found in the Appendix. Grantee names are **bolded in blue** throughout this report.

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[4] The data included in this report were published or provided to Child Trends in 2020.
[5] A small number of grantees were excluded from data collection (e.g., if their grants had ended or the grant supported a funding collaborative).

Spotlight on Significant Developments in 2020

Grantees played a pivotal role, in partnership with public agencies, in meeting the needs of youth and caregivers during the pandemic, particularly concerning technology. During the global pandemic, school closures across LA and NYC required students to attend school remotely, a considerable challenge for many foster TAY without adequate access to personal computers and Wi-Fi. In LA, the child welfare and education agencies worked with **iFoster** and numerous programmatic and philanthropic partners to supply technology to foster TAY. **iFoster** facilitated the distribution of approximately 9,500 laptops and phones to foster youth across LA. In NYC, grantees and their public agency partners identified and responded to the emergent needs of youth and caregivers. Examples include providing technology for remote education; providing food, personal protective equipment, and financial supports to youth and their caregivers; and supporting youth in postsecondary education to remain on campus, if possible, or identifying alternative placements.

Grantees engaged in advocacy efforts at the local, state, and national level, acting quickly to ensure decisionmakers prioritized foster TAY in their COVID responses. Local, state, and national leaders faced a number of competing priorities in their response to COVID-19, and foster TAY were uniquely and dramatically vulnerable to the pandemic's impacts. In LA, the **Alliance for Children's Rights**, **John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY)**, **Children Now**, **Children's Law Center**, and other grantees mobilized collaborative efforts requesting the governor take immediate action for foster youth through executive order. Many of their requests were incorporated into subsequent executive orders providing temporary child care and basic financial relief for families and youth. California's state leadership recognized the vulnerability of foster TAY and provided $40 million in Fiscal Year 2021 to enable youth who turn 21 to remain in care and in housing until July 2021. Grantees also issued recommendations for supporting students in foster care with distance learning and advocated for students with disabilities.

Outside of pandemic responses, grantees helped secure important legislative wins for foster youth in California. SB 860 passed in 2020, codifying the support and data collection that has occurred through **JBAY's** Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Challenge, and advocates including **Children Now** successfully maintained state funding for the Family Urgent Response System, a 24/7 crisis hotline and mobile response system for families and youth.

NYC scaled coaching and tutoring services for foster youth through **Fair Futures**, which as of June 30, 2020 had matched over 1,500 youth ages 14-20 with a coach to support them as they navigate education, employment, housing, and other services on their path to self-sufficiency, and provided tutoring to over 900 youth. During the pandemic, these individual relationships were more important than ever, as youth navigated social isolation and distance learning. Funding for **Fair Futures** expanded from $10 million to $12 million in 2020, following a successful advocacy campaign by youth, nonprofits, and other stakeholders. Advocacy helped reverse plans that would have cut funding to $2.75 million in the face of the city's pandemic-related fiscal constraints.

Progress Toward the Initiative's Objectives

During Phase II (2017-2020), the Initiative focused on three objectives with corresponding goals and expected results to help foster TAY achieve career and college success. Following are the major areas of accomplishments and progress across the three objectives in 2020:

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

Through its investment in **innovative youth-serving programs** and its efforts toward systems reform and knowledge development, the Initiative seeks to improve the educational and employment outcomes for youth. However, COVID-19 has created numerous and significant challenges for youth in accessing education and employment services; these challenges are detailed throughout this report. While significant investments have been made and actions taken to address these challenges, the full scope of the anticipated impacts of the pandemic on youth outcomes is not yet known. Available data on outcomes largely pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information on how programs have addressed increased needs during the pandemic, see the issue area snapshots.

Progress toward Objective 1

Foster TAY will have access to the supports, education, and career pathways they need to become self-sufficient and thrive.	
Expected Results[6]	**Progress Update**
70% of foster TAY will graduate high school on time (within four years of entering)	• In LA, the percentage of foster youth graduating within four years has steadily increased from 47 percent of students who entered high school in 2013-2014 to 57 percent of students who entered high school in 2016-2017.[7,8] • With the Initiative's support, the **Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI)**, a branch of the New York City Mayor's Office, completed preliminary graduation rate analyses for foster youth in NYC, which will be reported in future years. These data will fill a key gap in understanding because current graduation data for students in foster care in NYC do not follow cohorts of students over time.

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[6] 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.

[7] California Department of Education. (n.d.) 2016-17 Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Outcome: Los Angeles County Report. https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/CohOutcome.aspx?agglevel=county&year=2016-17&cds=19&ro=y

[8] California Department of Education. (n.d.) 2019-20 Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Outcome: Los Angeles County Report. https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/CohOutcome.aspx?cds=19&agglevel=County&year=2019-20&initrow=&ro=y

Foster TAY will have access to the supports, education, and career pathways they need to become self-sufficient and thrive.	
Expected Results[6]	**Progress Update**

90% of foster TAY will remain in their school of origin 90 days after placement change	• LA does not currently report school stability for foster youth. Some individual school districts have started tracking and reporting this information. For example, in LA Unified School District, students in foster care of <u>all ages</u> attended a median of one school during the 2018-2019 school year.[9] All five school districts in the **Alliance for Children's Rights'** professional learning network have seen gains in the percentage of students in foster care who remained in the same school for the entire school year.[10]
	
	• Newly available school stability data for NYC foster youth ages 14-20 show different trends for youth entering care and youth changing placements:
	
	   o School stability decreased over time for youth entering care, from 82 percent of youth remaining in their school of origin 90 days after initial placement during the 2016-2017 school year to 79 percent in the 2018-2019 school year.
	
	   o School stability has remained relatively stable over time for youth changing placements, decreasing slightly from 88 percent of youth who changed placements in the 2016-2017 school year remaining in their school of origin 90 days after placement change to 87 percent in the 2018-2019 school year.[11,12]

% of eligible foster TAY enrolled in postsecondary education program (two-year, four-year programs)	• The college-going rate for high school students in foster care graduating in LA in 2018-2019 had not been published by the California Department of Education at the time of this report. • In NYC, the percentage of foster TAY ages 18-20 in care who were enrolled in college remained stable from 2018 to 2019 at 14 percent (after increasing from 11 percent in 2017). After an increase from 2017 to 2018, the percentage of foster TAY, ages 18-20, who aged out of foster care and were enrolled in college or vocational school decreased in 2019: from 15 percent to 13 percent and from 4 percent to 3 percent, respectively.[13]

[9] LAUSD (2020). Foster Youth Annual Indicators, 2018-2019.
https://my.lausd.net/webcenter/portal/OpenData/pages_topics/targetedstudentpopulations
[10] School districts include Alhambra Unified School District, Bonita Unified School District, Long Beach Unified School District, Pomona Unified School District, and West Covina School District. From 2017-2018 to 2019-2020, with the exception of Long Beach Unified School District which had a baseline year of 2018-2019. Source: Email Correspondence.
[11] Data include youth who were 14 to 20 years old at time of placement or transfer. N=644 of 781 students initially placed in care; N=3,462 of 3,946 students who experienced a placement transfer. Source: Educational Continuity of Children in Foster Care, School Year 2016-2017 (By Age) provided by New York City Administration for Children's Services.
[12] Data include youth who were 14 to 20 years old at time of placement or transfer. N=536 of 677 students initially placed in care; N=2,795 of 3,209 students who experienced a placement transfer. Source: Educational Continuity of Children in Foster Care, School Year 2018-2019 (By Age) provided by New York City Administration for Children's Services.
[13] Among other data sources, this report uses Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA) data which is youth- or caseworker-reported and not verified, with more reliable administrative data. This data should be interpreted with caution. Source: New York City Administration for Children's Services. (2020). *Report on Youth in Foster Care, 2019*. https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2019/ReportOnYouthInFC2019.pdf

Foster TAY will have access to the supports, education, and career pathways they need to become self-sufficient and thrive.	
Expected Results[6]	**Progress Update**
% of eligible foster TAY who complete postsecondary education (two-year, four-year programs)	• Due to a change in data reporting within the Cal-PASS Plus data system, cohort-based postsecondary completion data are no longer regularly reported. Among all current and former foster youth enrolled in an LA community college in 2018-2019, 13 percent (1,085 students) earned an award that year or transitioned to a four-year institution by the end of the following school year.[14] • 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	• Neither LA nor NYC track and report comprehensive employment data for current and former foster youth. LA reports the number of foster youth who participate in public agency workforce development programs (1,287 current and former foster youth ages 14-25 in FY 2020).[15] • Grantees are working toward better data in NYC. The **Fair Futures** database launched in Fall 2020 collects standardized training and employment data for participating youth. **CIDI** will also analyze this data after experiencing initial delays in data access due to the pandemic.
75% of foster TAY ages 14–17 living in family foster care placements	• The percentage of foster youth ages 14-17 living in family-based placements in LA has steadily increased from a low of 59 percent (2,719 youth) in 2016 to 73 percent (3,002 youth) in 2020.[16] • In NYC, 73 percent of youth ages 14-17 (1,090 youth) lived in a family-based placement in 2020. This is a decrease from 79 percent (1,913 youth) in 2012.[17]

[14] Unduplicated count of all students who transferred to a California State University institution, University of California institution, any out-of-state institution, or an in-state private institution in the given or subsequent academic year (between July 1 of the given academic year and June 30 of the subsequent academic year) or earned an AA or AS degree, a credit certificate, or a noncredit certificate approved by the Chancellor's Office in the given academic year. Source: Cal-PASS Plus Foster Youth Dashboard - Community College as of December 1, 2020 provided by Education Results Partnership through a data request through John Burton Advocates for Youth.

[15] Totals represent foster youth served by WDACS in fiscal year 2019-2020 through Youth@Work including Work Based Learning (WBL) (data as of 10/6/2020) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (data as of 10/1/2020). Increase was achieved within the first eight months of the 2019-2020 fiscal year as enrollment paused in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Foster youth status based on demographic, not funding source. Source: Los Angeles County Department of Workforce, Development, Aging, and Community Services. (2020). *Workforce Development Programs Youth@Work Program: Participant Performance Report FY 2019-2020.* Email Correspondence.

[16] Among foster youth in care on July 1st of each year. Family-based placements include pre-adoptive, relative/non-relative extended family members (NREFM), foster, FFA, guardian-dependent, and guardian-independent, and trial home visit. Supervised Independent Living Placements (SILPs) are not counted here, although some foster TAY in SILPs are also living in family settings. Analyses includes all agency types. Source: Webster, D., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., …, Morris, N. (2020). *CCWIP reports.* http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare. 2020 data provided to Child Trends by DCFS on 02/03/21 and obtained from the University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project. CWS/CMS 2020 Quarter 2 Extract.

[17] Counts as of July 1 of the given year. Excludes youth whose entry reason is juvenile delinquency, youth in care for less than eight days, and youth in specialized placements. Not comparable to prior Evaluation Reports as data for this measure previously included youth in specialized placements. Source: New York State's CCRS database as of January 4, 2021 and CNNX database as of January 7, 2021 provided by New York City Administration for Children's Services.

Objective 2: Strengthen systems and policy for foster youth

As NYC and LA continue to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, many ongoing system reform and policy advocacy efforts were paused to prioritize responses to youths' and families' immediate needs. Grantees supported **cross-agency partnerships** to meet youths' needs and advocated at the local, state, and national level to **ensure that COVID-19 relief efforts include a focus on youth in foster care**. Through the Initiative's increased investments and grantees' amplified advocacy and existing collaborative partnerships, **public and private funding has been sustained or increased for key youth-serving programs**, even as the recession resulting from the pandemic threatens public funding streams.

Progress toward Objective 2

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.	
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	• **Youth-serving systems in LA and NYC have mobilized to share information and coordinate services during the pandemic**. New cross-agency partnerships in both jurisdictions have emerged to provide foster TAY with the technology needed for distance learning and maintaining supportive connections. **iFoster** has played a central role in these efforts in LA. • **Despite the challenges facing public agencies, grantees have expanded partnerships to support foster TAY**. In LA, the universal referral process to connect youth with work experience has been enhanced through an automated referral system. While the shift to remote education limits the need for transportation to foster youths' schools of origin, an outreach coordinator funded by the Initiative has continued engaging LA school districts to sign a transportation cost sharing agreement and, in partnership with grantees, advanced policy to simplify transportation reimbursement processes. Districts serving 75 percent of students in foster care are now covered by this agreement. In NYC, the Interagency Foster Care Task Force, staffed by several grantees, released its final report at the start of the pandemic. The Interagency Foster Care Task Force has guided system reform efforts in NYC, with recommendations specific to foster TAY now embedded in the child welfare agency's strategic plan.
Advocacy capacity will be expanded to promote and ensure the effective implementation of TAY-focused system and policy reform	• **Grantees continued their legislative and policy efforts but focused most of their energy on COVID-19 related issues at the local, state, and national levels**. We observed increased advocacy activity in NYC. For example, **Fair Futures** engaged a broad coalition including more than 1,100 young people to successfully advocate for program funding. In California, the **Alliance for Children's Rights** mobilized a group of advocates, including **Children Now** and several other grantees, to submit requests to the governor for immediate action and support for foster youth, resulting in executive orders and all county letters, with subsequent legislation and one-time funding. California grantees have issued recommendations for supporting students in foster care with distance learning and advocated for the rights of students with disabilities. **John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY)** supported 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.	
Expected Results	**Progress Update**
	passage of SB 860 that mandates schools assist and track foster youth applying for financial aid. At the national level, California grantees advocated for workforce, education, and postsecondary supports for youth, and the **Juvenile Law Center** worked with other national partners to outline federal policy priorities for current and former foster youth during the pandemic.
	• **The Initiative has leveraged the Foundation's new advocacy staff to weigh in on national issues**. With the support of dedicated internal advocacy staff hired in 2020, the Initiative is expanding its advocacy role, including filing an "amicus curiae" (friend of the court) brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in *Fulton v. Philadelphia*. The letter affirms the value of LGBTQ foster families as safe and affirming families for youth.
$60 million in new public funding and $30 million in private funding will be leveraged for foster TAY programs	• **During the pandemic, grantees used philanthropic resources, including increased investments from the Initiative detailed below, to nimbly respond to youth needs while supporting public agencies to develop system-wide responses.** Grantees worked quickly to provide youth with technology at the beginning of the pandemic, and more widespread public investment in these resources followed. For example, **JBAY** immediately covered the upfront costs for laptops and cell phones for foster youth in postsecondary education while the California Community College Chancellor's Office mobilized its response.
	• **The Initiative supplemented its ongoing investments in foster TAY with an additional $3 million in pandemic-specific funding this year**. Through direct engagement with each of its grantees and in partnership with its established philanthropic networks in NYC and LA, the Initiative identified and responded to immediate and ongoing needs in both jurisdictions (e.g., tutoring supports and direct emergency funds to youth and families). Recognizing the financial implications of COVID-19 on grantee organizations, the Initiative also provided operational support.
	• **Grantee and youth advocacy helped sustain key public investments in foster TAY among competing fiscal priorities**. Public agencies have faced and will continue to face significant budget shortfalls as a result of the pandemic. Through actively engaging youth, grantees in LA and NYC have been able to sustain funding for key programs threatened by the recession, including Youth@Work ($20 million) in LA, and **Children Now's** efforts to ensure implementation of the Family Urgent Response System ($30 million) in California, and **Fair Futures** ($12 million) in NYC.
	• **Grantees far exceeded the Initiative's leveraged funding goals**. In 2019, grantees leveraged $25.4 million in public funds and $14 million in private funds. From 2017-2019, grantees leveraged a total of $62.9 million in public funds and $31.6 million in private funds.[18]

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[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. While Phase II spanned 2017-2020, leveraged funding data are available only for 2017-2019 due to the timing of data collection.

Objective 3: Expand and share knowledge with the field

The Initiative continues to invest in expanding the use of data and evidence to drive program and policy solutions. While some research projects experienced delays due to COVID-19, the Initiative, its grantees, and stakeholders were still able to **advance data collection and integration in important ways**.

Progress toward Objective 3

A robust pipeline of foster TAY-focused research will be established to inform and guide the development of strong policy and practice.	
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	• **Grantees in California were somewhat successful in seeking legislative mandates for data collection and reporting**. SB 860, passed in 2020, requires that each county Office of Education report the number and percentage of students in foster care in 12th grade who complete the FAFSA. This institutionalizes the supports and data collection started through **JBAY**'s FAFSA Challenge. • **New data tools enhanced the NYC child welfare agency's ability to identify and support subpopulations of TAY**. A new data dashboard helps the agency better identify fathers in foster care, and the agency's crossover youth unit launched its new database this year, which automates notifications to case planners and other stakeholder and enhances data reporting when a youth in care is arrested. • **Grantees and public agency stakeholders used surveys to identify and respond to youth and caregiver needs during the pandemic**. For example, **iFoster** and the **Alliance for Children's Rights** surveyed youth and caregivers, respectively, as described in greater detail below.
A comprehensive cross-sector data strategy will enable all relevant foster TAY-serving agencies to share administrative data and measure progress toward self-sufficiency	• **Grantees advanced statewide cross-sector data initiatives**. California funded the new "Cradle to Career" data system this year that will link education, postsecondary, and workforce data. Foster youth will be flagged as a subpopulation in the data system, and multiple grantees including the **Children's Data Network**, **Opportunity Youth Collaborative (OYC)**, and **JBAY** are advising this work. • **The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed anticipated cross-sector data analyses in NYC.** The Initiative funded **CIDI** in 2019 to analyze and report cross-agency data on key indicators related to education and employment. Preliminary analyses of education data were completed in fall 2020, though delays in accessing employment data from New York State's Department of Labor continue.
Targeted research will be conducted and broadly disseminated to increase the knowledge and	• **While several knowledge grantees' projects experienced pandemic-related delays, their research continues to inform advocacy and system improvement efforts.** LA public agency stakeholders reported that findings from the **CalYOUTH** study motivated their efforts to support young people during the transition to postsecondary education. In NYC, the data-driven approach to foster parent

A robust pipeline of foster TAY-focused research will be established to inform and guide the development of strong policy and practice.	
Expected Results	**Progress Update**
evidence base to improve foster TAY outcomes	recruitment and retention supported by the Initiative through **Home Away from Home** continues, with the child welfare agency embedding related data analysis into its operations (e.g., providing monthly data to provider agencies on their progress toward established targets).

Key Findings Across the Initiative's Areas of Focus

The COVID-19 pandemic's effects on foster youth have been immediate and are expected to be long-lasting.

Youth in or who recently exited foster care face unique and multifaceted challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic with increased concerns about their physical and emotional well-being, safety, ability to meet their basic needs, and access to and engagement with education and employment opportunities. While available administrative data do not yet reflect the impacts of the

pandemic on youths' education and employment trajectories, **surveys of youth, caregivers, and program staff demonstrate significant needs**. For example, in California:

- Among 310 California foster youth surveyed by **iFoster**:
  - 53 percent needed a job to pay their bills,
  - 47 percent did not have enough to eat, and
  - 37 percent had housing needs[19]

- Based on a statewide survey of more than 200 caregivers, the **Alliance for Children's Rights** reported:

  - 42 percent are not comfortable providing support with technology to the children/youth in their home, and
  - 38 percent are not comfortable providing academic support to the children/youth in their home[20]

- In a statewide survey conducted by **JBAY** of campus support programs for foster youth:
  - 44 percent of programs reported a decrease in postsecondary enrollment during the pandemic.[21]

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[19] iFoster (2020, June 17). *Tech for CA Foster Youth: Summary Report of Tech Access Rapid Response during COVID-19.* Email correspondence.
[20] Alliance for Children's Rights (2020). *Identifying the Needs of Caregivers and Children during Distance Learning: Summary of Responses.*
[21] John Burton Advocates for Youth (2020, September 10). *Memorandum: Findings from campus survey on technology, enrollment, funding, and retention.* Email correspondence.

Available NYC administrative data also show early warning signs of the potential long-term implications of the pandemic for foster TAY. For example:

- Employment data estimates for the general population show that youth ages 18-24, persons of

- color, and individuals with a high school education or less were disproportionately impacted by job loss in the early stages of the pandemic in NYC,[23] and

- NYC's child welfare agency fell short of its target for newly certified foster homes in FY 2020 (304 homes, or 56 percent of the target of 544 homes). While the child welfare agency was on track to reach this target as of March 2020, foster parent recruitment and placement dropped in subsequent months, attributed largely to the impacts of COVID-19.[24]

> **Youth Voice**
>
> Samantha, a young person served by **Fair Futures**, shared in an op-ed: "*This pandemic is especially dangerous for youth in foster care, or, like me, those who have recently aged out of it. While most people have family to lean on, youth in care often have no one…. Now, we're facing even greater challenges like dorm evictions, online learning, access to housing, food, and staying safe amid COVID-19.*"[22]

Beyond these immediate needs, disruptions to foster youths' education and employment may have lasting effects on their secondary and postsecondary attainment and their employment prospects. While grantees and stakeholders work to keep youth engaged and connected to services and supports, re-engagement strategies will be especially important when education and training opportunities return in-person. **State and local budgets face anticipated shortfalls,[25] threatening the longevity of needed supports for TAY**. Cuts to program funding jeopardize the staffing infrastructure and continuity of services for youth.

The Initiative maintained its commitment to the six issue areas while responding to COVID-19 by meeting the urgent needs of youth during the pandemic.

The Initiative has **maintained its focus across all six issue areas, while demonstrating creativity and flexibility** as it pivoted and invested additional resources in services and advocacy efforts to meet emergent needs.

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[22] Cabrera, S. (2020, May 5). Op-ed: Everyone needs someone to lean on during COVID-19 – foster youth are no exception. *amNY*. https://www.amny.com/opinion/op-ed-everyone-needs-someone-to-lean-on-during-covid-19-foster-youth-are-no-exception/
[23] Parrott, J.A. & Moe, L. (2020). *The New Strain of Inequality: The Economic Impact of Covid-19 in New York City*. New York, NY: The New School Center for New York City Affairs. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53ee4f0be4b015b9c3690d84/t/5e974be17687ca34b7517c08/1586973668757/NNewStrainofInequality_April152020.pdf
[24] To reach this target, the NYC child welfare agency needed to meet 40 percent of its target in March 2020, at which point it had reached 36 percent. Source: New York City Administration for Children's Services. (2020). Data provided from presentation on October 6, 2020.
[25] Sheiner, L., & Campbell, S. (2020). How much is COVID-19 hurting state and local revenues? https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/09/24/how-much-is-covid-19-hurting-state-and-local-revenues/

Examples of innovative responses to the pandemic, by issue area

Issue Area	Los Angeles	New York City
Education	Grantees continue to educate stakeholders on opportunities to support the academic achievement of students in foster care, particularly during distance learning. The **Alliance for Children's Rights**, **Children Now**, and **Children's Law Center** issued recommendations for system-level partnerships and responses to reduce learning loss and support the most vulnerable students. Program grantees including **First Star**, **FosterEd**, and **United Friends of the Children** put forth best practices for education professionals to support youths' stability and engagement.	Funding for **Fair Futures** expanded to $12 million, following a successful advocacy campaign by youth and partners and despite an initial plan to cut funding to just $2.75 million. Through one-on-one relationships, Fair Futures coaches have helped keep youth connected, supported, and engaged in school. An infusion of philanthropic support, including $1 million from the Initiative, will ensure these coaching services are supplemented with tutoring through the **New York Foundling**.
Postsecondary	**JBAY** partnered with the child welfare and education agencies and campus support programs to hold virtual tours and orientations for new students at 26 colleges. They hope to continue offering this accessible option after the pandemic.	Grantees such as **Children's Aid** provided individualized advocacy to ensure college students maintained their housing, received course credit, and had access to virtual supports, including academic and mental health resources, following the closure of university campuses.
Employment	**OYC** partnered with the workforce agency to move the Transition-Age Youth World of Work (TAY WOW) curriculum online, expediting a process that would have otherwise taken years. Youth received stipends for completing the program virtually.	Grantees such as **The Door** have transitioned their workforce programming online and expanded their focus to include supporting youth with accessing unemployment and other public benefits.
Placement	Advocates, including **Children Now,** successfully maintained state funding for the Family Urgent Response System, a 24/7 crisis hotline and response system for families, which will be launched with active community engagement in early 2021.	The child welfare agency and its provider agencies enhanced online recruitment and training for prospective foster families. Provider agencies, including several grantees, have increased their social media presence and revamped their websites to promote engagement and accessibility. In 2021, the child welfare

Issue Area	Los Angeles	New York City
		agency will fund the implementation of a web-based system to streamline the certification process.
Focused Interventions: Reproductive Health and Expectant and Parenting Foster Youth	The shift to remote service delivery and additional funding from the Initiative enabled the **Alliance for Children's Rights** and **Public Counsel** to more than double the number of Expectant and Parenting Youth team meetings that connect youth with important parenting, home visitation, education, and housing resources.	The Adolescent Health Unit at the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, supported through the **Fund for Public Health**, shifted to virtual trainings and leveraged relationships with provider agencies to share information on open clinics and contraceptive access during the pandemic.
Focused Interventions: Crossover Youth	**Children's Law Center's** Crossover Advocacy & Resource Effort (CARE) program shifted to virtual service delivery, using social work interns to establish and maintain connection with crossover youth during the pandemic. Virtual platforms have also been used to train community-based organizations on the county's youth diversion program.	Collaboration among the child welfare agency, the **Vera Institute for Justice**, and other stakeholders increased as they shared the goal of releasing youth with lower-level offenses at the onset of the pandemic. Many youth were released on extended home visits, presenting an opportunity for transition to aftercare.
Cross-System Coordination	The **LA Reproductive Health Equity Project (LA RHEP)** deepened partnerships with the health and child welfare agencies, medical hubs serving foster youth, and other community partners to ensure foster youth had access to health care navigators and telehealth services during the pandemic.	To facilitate coordinated and timely responses to individuals and families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, public agencies have been sharing data with **CIDI** for operational purposes more quickly and freely than they have in the past.

Detailed information on each issue area is available in the snapshots linked here:

- Education
- Postsecondary
- Employment
- Placement
- Focused Interventions (for expectant and parenting foster youth and crossover youth)
- Cross-System Coordination

Many of the innovative solutions developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic should be sustained into the future.

Grantees and public agency partners developed several innovative solutions in response to the pandemic that have the potential to better support youth long after the immediate crisis ends. For example:

- **Enhanced strategies to center the needs and voices of young people with lived experience can provide a blueprint for future action**. While grantees and stakeholders have a long history of engaging youth in advocacy efforts, we identified several examples of effective youth leadership during the pandemic (e.g., in sustaining funding for **Fair Futures** in NYC and Youth@Work in LA). Youth have also played an active role in virtual conferences, such as the Initiative's annual convening, with their participation enhanced by the chat and other virtual communication tools. By ensuring that young people with lived experience continue to inform the priorities and solutions in LA and NYC, the Initiative can create real and lasting change.

- **A combination of virtual and in-person service delivery may allow grantees and their partners to reach more youth.** During the pandemic, youth have been able to access everything from college orientations to sexual and reproductive health services online. By maintaining these options after the pandemic ends, grantees and stakeholders may be able to reach more youth or different populations of youth than they serve in person with the potential for more frequent interactions and greater responsiveness by service providers.

- **Cross-system partnerships and data sharing may pave the way for stronger systemic responses in the future**. Public agency stakeholders and grantees have partnered to distribute technology to young people, build virtual service delivery, and share data and information at unprecedented speeds this year. Building on and sustaining these partnerships will be crucial in pandemic recovery efforts and beyond.

Looking Ahead

Throughout Phase II (2017-2020), the Initiative remained dedicated to the educational and employment success of foster TAY and rose to meet the unique challenges posed in 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Foundation's continued and expanded investments to support foster youths' educational and employment success are as crucial as ever. The pandemic has shed new light on the challenges faced by youth-serving systems and highlighted the vast inequities young people in and transitioning out of foster care endure. Through its grantees, public and private partnerships, and leveraged funding, the Initiative is well-positioned to speed recovery and ensure improvements in outcomes for transition-age foster youth.

The Initiative's expanded focus on racial equity and planned investments in mental health and housing are timely. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified existing racial/ethnic disparities and pushed systems into crisis mode as they seek to respond to heightened and immediate needs of youth and families. National and local protests opposing racism and police brutality have spurred a reckoning in public systems, including child welfare and education. California grantees anticipate that racial equity issues will be prominent in the next legislative session, providing an opportunity to build on the momentum in the child welfare field and country to pursue policy solutions that advance racial equity through systems-level transformation. Several grantees and public agencies in LA and NYC have begun to examine their work through a race equity lens with knowledge grantees providing data

support. Many of these efforts are in the early stages and will require intentionality, accountability, and a focus on understanding and addressing the systemic drivers of disparities. Finally, the Initiative's expanded focus on housing and mental health promotes youth wellbeing as it navigates education and employment addressing needs that have been frequently raised by grantees and stakeholders and that have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

The pandemic has had far-reaching impacts on foster youth, and while the Initiative and grantees have been nimble in their response, the long-term effects on foster youths' educational and employment success are unknown, and the road to recovery will likely be long. **Many ongoing public agency efforts have stalled because of the pandemic, and the Initiative and its partners will need to revisit and reinvigorate these efforts, when appropriate, to achieve their desired outcomes.** At the same time, grantees and public agencies developed innovative solutions to understand and meet the needs of youth and caregivers during the pandemic, working in close partnership across systems and at unprecedented speeds. Sustaining these efforts beyond the immediate crisis has the potential to improve youth outcomes. Through its grantmaking, advocacy, and partnership-building roles, the Initiative can continue to ensure decision makers prioritize foster youth, sustain youth-serving programs through unpredictable public funding climates, and leverage this opportunity to amplify youth voices and equity in all recovery efforts.

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 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		●	
Greater Horizons		●	
John Burton Advocates for Youth	●		
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	●	●	
United Friends of the Children		●	
University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration (CalYOUTH)			●
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)			●
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)	●	●	

	Systems/ Policy	Program	Knowledge
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	●		
Tides Center			●
Vera Institute for Justice	●	●	