Preventing Homelessness

Youth Exiting Foster Care in Los Angeles County

Young people exiting from foster care in Los Angeles County face significant risk of housing instability and homelessness, making targeted prevention strategies essential to supporting their long-term well-being. This brief report provides a snapshot of programs related to prevention of homelessness for young adults in Los Angeles County as they exit foster care.

Introduction

Los Angeles County is home to one of the largest populations of foster youth in the United States, and many of these young people face a heightened risk of homelessness as they age out of the system. Each year, more than 1,140 youth exit foster care in LA County, with 20 to 40 percent experiencing housing instability or homelessness soon after.[1] As of June 2025, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) oversees 18,650 youth in care, including 2,457 age 18 or older.[2] Nearly one-third of youth experiencing homelessness in LA County have had some contact with the foster care system, underscoring the close connection between child welfare involvement and housing instability. According to the 2025 Point-In-Time Youth Count, 3,085 youth ages 18–24 are experiencing homelessness, compared to 3,227 youth in the same count from 2024.[3,4] This crisis demands focused attention to break cycles of instability and prevent long-term consequences of chronic homelessness. This report describes existing services and programs in LA County and synthesizes insights from interviews with service providers, system administrators, and individuals with lived experience to highlight current system strengths and identify opportunities for improvement to better serve and prevent homelessness for foster youth. The audience for this report includes system funders, government agencies, community organizations, and other groups that focus on homeless prevention strategies.

Background

Homelessness among youth and young adults is a critical concern, particularly for those with a history in the foster care system. Youth exiting foster care often face inadequate income, housing instability, weak social support, underutilized benefits, and a lack of life skills to understand housing markets—all of which challenge their ability to navigate complex systems.[5] Despite investments in transitional housing, voucher programs, and wraparound services, the demand for this support far exceeds supply. Even youth who experienced relatively stable placements or exited care through permanent means may still face housing crises.

Young people exiting foster care often lack consistent access to education, employment, mental health care, and legal or documentation support—all of which are vital to securing and sustaining housing.[5, 6] Traditional housing programs may fall short of meeting the unique developmental needs of this population, especially as providers serve younger cohorts like Gen Z and Gen Alpha. These younger generations are shaped by their digital upbringing, experiences with systemic inequities, and changing norms around identity and community. Compared to earlier generations, Gen Z and Gen Alpha are entering adulthood or growing up amid more severe and more frequent housing affordability crises, faster technology shifts, higher mental health needs, and stronger expectations for equity. Programs need to adapt to these realities, prioritizing digital-first engagement, trauma-informed and equity-centered care, flexible financial support, and prevention models that address intergenerational instability.

Racial and Ethnic Disparities

Black youth are dramatically overrepresented in both the foster care and homeless youth populations in LA County. Although they account for only seven percent of LA County's total youth population, Black youth comprise 26 percent of the foster care population[2] and 41 percent of youth experiencing homelessness.[3] Latinx youth, while slightly *under*represented among youth experiencing homelessness (47 percent) relative to their share of the foster population (59 percent), also experience disparities, particularly in accessing services and using housing support. Youth of color generally face additional barriers to prevention programs, including racial bias in eligibility screening, fewer referrals from school or child welfare systems, and a lack of culturally responsive services.[5]

DCFS Organizational Structure

Foster youth in LA County are served through DCFS's extensive network of offices and divisions, each playing a role in preparing them for life after foster care. DCFS comprises extensive bureaus, divisions, and 20 regional offices throughout LA County, and has nearly 9,000 staff. Regional Office Children's Social Workers (CSWs) hold caseloads and are tasked with transition plan meetings from foster care to system exit. The Supportive Housing Division is

Definitions

NMD. Non minor dependent, a youth in DCFS care with an open case who are in California's Extended Foster Care (EFC) program

FUP/FYI Voucher. Family Unification Program or Foster Youth to Independence, Section 8 housing/rental assistance administered by public housing authorities (PHAs). The FYI program is part of and builds upon the FUP program.

SPA. Service Planning Areas, which are the geographic regions all County Departments divide services in LA County responsible for streamlining housing services for youth aged 18–24. As the secondary support to Regional Offices, they help answer CSW questions regarding what housing opportunities are available.

Housing and Supportive Services Programs

A youth's age and having an open case (currently in foster care) or closed case with DCFS determines eligibility for programs. DCFS funds nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs) to operate housing programs designed to support youth currently in foster care, including with the goal of preventing homelessness as they exit the system. It also funds programs for youth who have aged out and whose cases are closed (described below).

Youth may move from one DCFS-funded program to another as their age or case status changes. In addition to these programs, several initiatives focused on preventing homelessness among foster youth are co-administered, contracted, or operated in partnership with DCFS and other government agencies. The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) also operates programs for young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, including those who have a closed foster care case or are within six months of closing. Exhibit 1 displays each program and selected eligibility criteria.

It is important to note the role of CBOs in LA County. DCFS contracts with approximately 13 to 19 CBOs to provide transitional housing and related support for foster youth. For the Transitional Housing Program for Nonminor Dependents (THP-NMD), there are 11 contracted CBOs across Service Planning Areas (SPAs) 1—4 and 6—8 managing a total capacity of 418 beds. Meanwhile, the Independent Living Program (ILP), focused on youth with closed cases, operates via six CBOs spanning SPAs 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8, providing a further 91 beds. In addition, the Transitional Housing Program Plus (THP+) offers 185 beds across eight contracted CBOs countywide.

In total, this indicates at least 25 distinct contracts across these three DCFS-funded housing programs. These organizations vary widely in size from small, targeted providers with just 10 beds (like Safe Place for Youth's Stepping Stones) to larger multi-site nonprofits administering dozens of units countywide. Structurally, these agencies range from community-based grassroots organizations to more established nonprofits with multiple campuses and broad service portfolios. Many receive project-based funding from DCFS, often alongside grants from philanthropic partners or other County departments, enabling them to offer a comprehensive suite of services including housing, case management, life skills education, mental health support, and financial navigation.

DCFS Open-Case Programs

Transitional Housing Programs for Non-Minor Dependents. (THP-NMD): THP-NMD provides supervised housing, case management, and life skills development for youth aged 18–21 with an open DCFS case. To remain eligible, participants must attend school or work. Currently, the program capacity is 418 beds, operated by 11 contracted CBOs in SPAs 1–4 and 6–8, funded by DCFS.

Supervised Independent Living Program (SILP): SILP allows NMDs to live independently in their own apartment, single-room occupancy (SRO) unit, or rented room, while receiving a monthly stipend or foster care payment directly from DCFS. Youth must undergo an assessment to determine their readiness, as SILP offers the most independent option available for NMDs, with a "light touch" model of case management and life skills supports provided by DCFS staff. As of June 2025, 1,038 youth are participating in SILP.[7]

Optimist—Transitional Living Settings: This small-scale temporary placement program, operated by Optimist Youth Homes and Family Services and funded by DCFS, serves NMDs aged 18-21 who have an open case or are reentering extended foster care and who experience a temporary housing disruption with no current housing plan. The program provides temporary housing, case management, a weekly food allowance of $138, education and employment support, and housing navigation to secure a permanent option quickly. Mental health services are offered in partnership with the Department of Mental Health (DMH). This program acts as a safety net for youth with an open case.

Safe Place for Youth—Stepping Stones: This 10-bed program is specifically for youth very close to aging out with no identified housing plan, whose housing plan has fallen through very close to exit, or who are awaiting new program entry and need a place to stay in the brief interim. This program provides temporary shared housing, case management, life skills support, and housing navigation to find permanent housing. Youth can stay up to 60 days with possibility of extension. This program also serves many young people who experience homelessness shortly after emancipating and find it by word-of-mouth, although that is unofficial and funded separately.

DCFS Closed-Case Programs

Independent Living Program (ILP): ILP serves youth aged 16-20 with a closed DCFS case who were in foster care between ages 16-18. The program offers a range of support, including housing, case management, financial assistance (including an emergency housing allowance and move-in and security deposit costs), and education-related support like tuition assistance, books/supplies, exam and program fees, and coverage for graduation expenses. ILP also provides jobs and skills development and life skills support. Currently, ILP has 91 beds available across six CBOs in SPAs 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8.

Transitional Housing Program Plus (THP+): THP+ provides transitional housing for youth who exited foster care at age 18 or older. Participants can receive housing for up to 36 cumulative months or until the age of 25—whichever comes first—and must work toward goals outlined in their Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP). The program includes case management, mental health support, financial and life skills programming, and money management assistance. THP+ currently has a capacity of 185 beds across eight contracted CBOs, with beds available in all SPAs.

Other Government Agency-Administered Programs

Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) and Family Unification Program (FUP): Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) administer these HUD-funded programs, offering Section 8 housing voucher rental assistance for up to 36 months. Foster youth are eligible if they are 18-24 years and have exited care or will exit within 90 days and are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Youth who meet additional requirements, such as achieving certain educational or employment milestones, may qualify for an additional 24 months of rental assistance. CBOs assist youth with Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) applications, obtaining housing, and case management throughout their stay. PHAs must demonstrate partnership with the local public child welfare agency to apply for this program and these vouchers have changed from non-competitive to competitive allocation. As of May 2025, 970 vouchers have been awarded to seven PHAs within LA County, and 759 youth currently have leases.[8] Over the past two years there has been a concerted effort by the Supportive Housing Division and advocates to engage PHAs across LA County to partner with DCFS. As of August 2025, about half of the 19 PHAs in LA County have partnered with DCFS to apply for FYI vouchers.

Project HopeBridge: This pilot, funded by the Los Angeles County Development Authority (LACDA), provides up to 24 months of rapid rehousing for 15 youth aged 18–21 who are exiting care, ILP, THP+, or on the FYI waitlist.[9] The DCFS Supportive Housing Division refers eligible youth directly. The program emphasizes workforce development and is operated by the Coalition for Responsible Community Development. DCFS staff reported that this pilot is expected to expand in the near future.

DHS Housing Navigation Program: This program enables the Department of Health Services (DHS) to provide Intensive Case Management Services (ICMS) for youth aged 18–24 who hold an FYI voucher. Services include case management, unit search and application assistance, landlord engagement, and in-home supportive services for the duration of the voucher. DCFS works closely with DHS to directly refer eligible youth within 90 days of system exit.

LAHSA Housing and Prevention Programs

LAHSA Youth Coordinated Entry System (YCES): YCES is part of LA's Coordinated Entry System (CES), a no-wrong-door system designed for youth ages 16—24. It offers trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate shelter, housing, and support services that prioritize safety and skills-building for youth experiencing homelessness. Each SPA has multiple CBOs involved and one YCES lead agency in each that is responsible for coordinating services and making housing referrals. LAHSA's 2025 Housing Inventory Count shows a total of at least 1,525 beds specifically filled by and dedicated to TAY.[10]

LAHSA Problem-Solving and Prevention Programs: Although these programs are not designed specifically for youth, those at risk of homelessness can access certain services, including temporary financial assistance, housing stabilization, help with utility deposits and arrears, legal support, eviction prevention, and reunification expenses. To be eligible, youth must: a) be experiencing a financial crisis; b) have received an unlawful detainer or written notice of intent to terminate tenancy; c) lack financial and support resources; and d) be assessed as high risk for homelessness. While foster youth are not explicitly excluded, most would not meet these eligibility criteria, particularly criterion b, since only those in a SILP with a lease in their name and meeting all the additional criteria would qualify. Foster youth in all other DCFS-funded programs described here would not meet this criterion, making it very unlikely that foster youth would access this program.

In fiscal year (FY) 24/25, 173 Youth Families (a family with a head of household aged 18–24) were served, with 34 achieving a permanent housing exit (19 percent). Additionally, 58 youth aged 18–24 were served, with 12 securing permanent housing exit (20 percent).[11] These numbers, relative to the broader population of youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness, suggest limited program uptake, due at least in part to strict eligibility requirements that are difficult for youth to meet, particularly given the ways they experience homelessness.

DCFS/Probation Liaison Program: Through this program, LAHSA funds the YCES lead agency in each SPA to staff Liaisons who serve as mobile access points, helping youth transition between the homelessness system (CES), DCFS, and Probation. Liaisons work directly with youth at risk of homelessness to prevent housing loss by using problem-solving conversations and tools, administering a youth-specific triage and referral instrument known as the "Next Step Tool," and referring eligible young adults to LAHSA-funded and non-LAHSA-funded programs.

Notably, foster youth can only be placed in LAHSA-funded housing programs if their case is closed. Prior to the pandemic, Liaisons regularly co-located in DCFS regional offices, provided CES and homelessness training for DCFS staff, and participated in 90-day case conferencing for youth approaching system exit.

However, collaboration has since ebbed. Key tensions have included disagreements about responsibility for preparing youth for housing while cases remain open, legal limitations on DCFS involvement post-exit, and differing views on prioritizing foster youth within the homelessness system. These issues were especially pronounced after LAHSA received a Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) grant in 2022. Some Regional Offices collaborate with their assigned Liaison, while others do not. DCFS staff send referrals to Liaisons since the launch of a referral portal in 2024 but this is inconsistent across Regional Offices. Aligning and prioritizing communication and engagement from leadership at both LAHSA and DCFS will be key to relationship building and re-establishing trainings and co-location.

It is also important to note that the ILP program described above was originally administered by DCFS, transitioned to LAHSA oversight with the launch of YCES in FY 16/17, and returned to DCFS in FY 23/24. These shifts have contributed to some of the challenges with the programs.

Exhibit 1. Overview of Eligibility for Housing and Supportive Services Programs for Foster Youth

Program Name	Age Eligibility	Foster Status Eligibility	Are youth eligible for LAHSA/CES-funded Programs if they're currently using this program?	Are youth eligible for DCFS-funded Programs if they're currently using this program?
LAHSA/CES Housing	16-24	Closed case	✓	No
LAHSA Problem Solving and Prevention	18-24	N/A	✓	✓
LAHSA DCFS/Probation Liaison Program	16-24	Case closing within 6 months	✓	Not once case is closed
THP-NMD	18-21	Open case	No	✓
ILP	16-20	Closed case	No	✓
THP+	18-24	Closed case	No	✓
SILP	18-21	Open case	No	✓
FYI/FUP section 8 vouchers	18-24	Open or closed case	Once case is closed	If case is closing within six months

Cash Assistance and Financial Support

> **"The rising costs right at this point, you know, I can barely live in LA. So, I can only imagine for a young person who is leaving foster care, who's trying to take their time to process their trauma."** *- DCFS administration staff*

Financial insecurity is a central challenge for foster youth, who often lack the extended support networks that other young people rely on to offset expenses. With LA's high cost of living, cash assistance can help support housing needs for these youth. As with adult-focused programs, these initiatives vary in flexibility—that is, in how assistance can be used, whether it is tied to housing, or if it is more broadly available for other expenses. The following programs are specific to foster youth and include a component of cash assistance.

SILP: SILP provides a one-time fund of $2,500 to foster youth with an open case, which can be used for housing deposits, rent, appliances, furniture, and related needs. Additional funding may be available based on individual circumstances. Youth in SILP also receive a monthly foster care payment directly.

THP-NMD: THP-NMD provides a monthly allowance of $700 to youth with an open case with no restrictions on how the funds can be used. Youth are required to save 10 percent of this allowance each month. While in the program, their rent and utilities are fully covered.

Expecting and Parenting Youth Navigation Program: This program, operated by St. Anne's Family Services and funded by DCFS, serves mothers and fathers aged 18-26 who exited foster care at or after age 17 and who are expecting a child or already parenting. Participants receive a flexible, one-time payment of $5,000 that can be used for rent, furnishings, childcare, education costs, and more. The program is notable for explicitly serving single fathers as well as mothers.

In addition, several Guaranteed Income (GI) programs for TAY have included foster youth as an eligible population.

Funded by the California Department of Social Services, there are multiple programs across the state within the **California Guaranteed Income Pilot Program** that focus on foster youth and pregnant individuals. In each program, recipients are allowed to maintain any other benefits they may receive, which ensures that the GI funds are truly a supplement to existing resources rather than a replacement.

Among these California Guaranteed Income Pilots, only **iFoster** focuses on foster youth and operates in LA County (others are based in San Francisco, Riverside, San Bernadino, and Ventura counties).[12] Enrollment occurred between November 2023 and May 2024, and youth were eligible for this GI pilot if they were aging out of extended foster care and supervised by either DCFS or probation at age 21. Participants receive $750/month for 18 months. While 354 youth are enrolled statewide,[13] enrollment data specific to LA County is not yet available.

Breathe: LA County's Guaranteed Income Program was started in 2022 and expanded in 2023 to include 200 former LA DCFS foster youth between the ages of 18—21, each receiving $1000 per month. A subsequent 2024 expansion is providing $500 payments to more than 2,000 youth, with payments lasting 18 months.[14]

One additional GI pilot, **TAYportunity,** is not specific to foster youth but focuses on work-ready young adults age 18—24, many of whom may have had recent involvement with the foster or probation systems.[15] A lengthier program, participants receive $1,000 per month for 36 months. TAYportunity combines cash stability, career development, and supportive services in an integrated model.

A new cash assistance program is called the **Direct Cash Transfer as Prevention (CASH LA DCT-P) Pilot**, led by Point Source Youth and overseen by Arming Minorities Against Addiction & Disease (AMAAD). This program will provide one-time direct financial assistance (averaging $2,500—$3,700) and optional short-term supportive services to young adults (ages 18—30) at imminent risk of homelessness in LA County. The pilot will serve about 100 participants and was co-designed with youth with lived experience.

Challenges

Across all efforts to support the housing needs of foster youth exiting the system or housing programs, interviewees consistently emphasized a fundamental issue: there simply is not enough affordable housing in LA County. Rising inflation and inadequate public transportation further limit young adults' ability to secure safe housing within their means.

While these factors affect many populations in LA, they are especially acute for young adults exiting foster care because they lose access to support they previously relied on. Many lack an adequate safety net system and face the daunting task of navigating complex systems that, until now, caseworkers managed on their behalf. They therefore have little preparation for, or insight into, the process.

In addition, confusion surrounding the eligibility criteria for housing tied to open versus closed DCFS cases diminishes program effectiveness. Both youth and service providers report that neither youth nor key system actors (such as judges and CSWs) fully understand the implications of closing or keeping a case open when it comes to accessing certain housing programs. As a result, decisions about case status can inadvertently create missed opportunities to pursue the most beneficial options for youth at critical points in their transition.

> **"The judges often don't know the ins and outs of transitional housing ... so when they hear a youth has to emancipate in order to get into a program, they elect not to allow it, when in reality, youth receive much more services in ILP or THP+."– *Foster care program administration staff.***

Exhibit 1 and the program descriptions above illustrate both the significant overlap in program eligibility and the nuanced ways that age, care history, and exit dates shape what foster youth can access. Further, it illustrates how depending on the program they select, it can have consequences for what they might be eligible for later on. While no two programs offer exactly the same services, the complexity of determining what a foster youth qualifies for in a given situation further increases the challenge of effectively preventing homelessness among this population. Consistent with this, in interviews, service providers emphasized the need for clearer coordination across programs to improve understanding and access, and smooth "warm handoff" transitions between programs. There is some work currently underway through the LA County Prevention and Promotion Systems Governing Committee to provide user journey maps for TAY navigating housing benefits which would help provide greater clarity about transitions.[16]

Recent collaborative efforts involving County departments, philanthropic leaders, and service providers have identified local investment opportunities that could complement FYI vouchers and potentially fund youth or foster youth-specific transitional or permanent supportive housing models. However, FYI voucher-holders still face the challenge of finding affordable housing units in LA County, often competing with other Section 8 voucher types or housing programs that offer landlord incentives, something the FYI voucher program does not do. One service provider highlighted how difficult it is to find affordable units working with youth who have an FYI voucher. This is especially the case since the DHS ICMS services and Case Manager are supposed to be paired with voucher holders but are not. Further, safety is often a concern in the areas where they are able to locate a viable unit. California's statewide Homekey Program converts hotels and motels into interim or permanent housing.[17] However, the County has prioritized Homekey sites for families and individuals. While youth-headed families and youth themselves may be technically eligible based on household composition and age, they often do not meet the acuity vulnerability or chronic homelessness criteria required for entry (or score too low), closing off these options. This highlights how important YCES is to serve youth specifically and prevent further adult homelessness.

LAHSA's prevention programming further illustrates systemic barriers. Its eligibility criteria—such as requiring an eviction notice or order—make it difficult to serve youth who do not have a lease in their own name. This excludes key groups of at-risk youth, including those doubled up, exiting care without housing, in college and losing dorm access between semesters, and newly arrived in LA. This creates a cycle that perpetuates literal youth homelessness. For the few youth who do qualify, processing the financial assistance is often delayed, leaving them at risk while they wait.

Lack of systems and program coordination is another challenge. For example, during interviews both providers and youth noted that case exit and transition planning often begins too late, even within DCFS itself to transition to extended foster care. This leaves insufficient time for youth to establish trust or even awareness of new contacts who could help them navigate services. With many departments and agencies all having investment in preventing foster youth homelessness—including DCFS, LAHSA, DMH, the Department of Youth Development, and the Commission for Children and Families—a stronger, more collaborative approach is needed. Providers and County representatives noted how staffing and time-intensive the contracting process with County Departments can be, advocating for a streamlined contracting process that allows more CBOs to participate.

Finally, respondents noted the challenge in accessing services that are necessary to thrive in LA County, such as help obtaining a driver's license and financial literacy education. While finding stable housing is critical, these other tools and support are necessary to retain it and avoid future homelessness.

What's Working

Interviews with providers and youth suggest five practices that are helping youth maintain housing stability as they leave care: individualized services, a focus on quality over quantity, skilled and representative staff, flexibility, and meaningful financial support.

> **"It is about having the right services for them available and then making sure that the services are delivered in a package that they really want to accept, and that package is individualized, … [youth] need to be in control over their services too."** *– Foster care program administration staff.*

Tailored or individualized services help prevent homelessness by meeting youth where they are, acknowledging their unique circumstances, and ensuring that support is tailored to specific needs and goals. Providers reported that focus groups and other feedback mechanisms have allowed them to learn directly what is working (or not), and adjusting as a result. For example, one organization changed its program model after learning from youth that it was not meeting their needs, shifting to youth choice to ensure they were responsive in addressing needs. Providers highlighted the benefits of offering options that allow youth to "try on" different experiences before being forced into narrow definitions of success. Another provider highlighted the importance of providing fully furnished units for youth. Offsetting the many costs of furnishing a unit, in addition to the wraparound services and community focus provided, is a key part of their high housing retention rates. This individualization and avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach may help foster ownership and improve the youth's chance of maintaining stability.

> **"Young people have said to us 'everyone who is in our lives are paid to be there. The foster parents, the social workers, our attorneys, even the teachers at school, nobody is really into being in authentic relationship with us'. So we really leaned into volunteerism to make sure youth get to build relationships with whoever they want. These people are here because they're interested in you, not because we're paying them."** *– Foster care program administration staff.*

A focus on **quality and depth** of services rather than expanding program size or focusing on numbers served was also cited as critical to fostering housing stability. Programs that build trust and support soft skills help youth succeed. By fostering community and taking a holistic approach to well-being, these programs help youth develop the personal and practical skills needed to maintain housing after leaving care. One service provider cited this as a reason for their high housing stability metrics and less frequent returns to services after program graduation. Other service providers similarly noted the value of providing a menu of services with a comprehensive approach such as housing, education, career, well-being, art, culture, mental health—in short helping youth to, "build a future."

Strong **staffing practices** further reinforced housing stability. Providers described the value of employing staff who reflect the backgrounds and identities of the youth they serve, including those with lived experience in foster care. These staff members were able to build trusting relationships and model success and were skilled in person-centered relational approaches. The relevance of this to preventing homelessness is that youth interviewed in this project reported that they felt successful outcomes often stemmed from their positive relationships. Several service providers echoed this, noting how well youth receive and relate to these staff, which then makes it easier for staff to aid youth. Providers also highlighted the value of skillsets related to working with youth, including trauma informed care, as well as having different specializations that allow for matching based on youth's needs and preferences.

Youth consistently highlighted **flexibility** as a key factor in program services to help them avoid homelessness. Programs that made accommodations—such as extending deadlines, allowing exceptions (e.g., to live with a sibling during COVID-19), or scheduling meetings around youth commitments—allowed them to stay engaged more easily. Providers and system administrators also noted that the concept of flexibility extends to partnerships with other organizations and highlighted the value of working with various kinds of partners to promote community.

> **"Not having to worry about rent is so helpful because California is super expensive, there's so much opportunity here in California as far as schools and jobs, but I could never afford living here on my own without these opportunities."**
> *– Youth with lived experience*

Finally, **financial support** is essential to preventing homelessness. Youth said that monthly stipends and programs covering rent and utilities allowed them to focus on education and career development rather than staying in "survival mode." When youth are in this mode, a focus on housing can also slip. Without this support, they would not be able to afford other expenses such as car insurance, gas, or education-related costs, much less avoid homelessness. Several youth expressed that they would not be able to live in LA without financial support and that they plan to move to more suburban areas of the County that feel more affordable once their program eligibility ends. Providers confirmed that financial assistance helps fill critical affordability gaps, especially when youth face temporary situations such as job loss, injury, or illness. At the same time, they stressed the importance of pairing financial support with efforts to promote self-sufficiency and dignity, so that youth leave programs better prepared to explore their capabilities, proactively solve problems, and not be dependent on support.

Anticipated Impact of Measure A

Measure A is a countywide ballot initiative approved by LA County voters in November 2024 that replaced Measure H as of April 1, 2025. In contrast to the quarter-cent tax of Measure H, Measure A enacts a half-cent sales tax to fund affordable housing development, homelessness services, and homelessness prevention and is expected to raise more than $1 billion annually. The approved FY25/26 budget[18] identifies multiple programs to serve foster youth and other TAY that would increase housing stability.

- $15.5 million for Transitional Housing for TAY, consisting of Housing First, low-barrier, harm reduction-based transitional housing for TAY (ages 18-24) as part of the crisis response system (no change in funding from FY24-25).
- $3.33 million for Youth Homelessness and Prevention, a new initiative providing direct housing assistance to General Relief recipients who are system-impacted TAY at high risk of long-term homelessness. The program will support pathways to long-term housing stability, strengthen connections to the County's social safety net, serve approximately 500 youth annually, and will be included in the Measure A evaluation agenda.
- $1.7 million to support Youth Family Reconnection, which includes therapeutic interventions to support TAY in establishing and strengthening relationships with both biological and non-biological family members.
- $780,000 allocated for Host Homes for TAY, a community-based Housing First and harm reduction-based model where youth are matched with volunteer hosts who provide temporary housing in their housing units (Decrease from $967,000 in FY 24-25).
- $333,000 to the Youth Homeless Demonstration Project, which supports CES staffing, move-in assistance, and compensation for youth feedback.
- $43,000 to supported housing related assistance consisting of case management and housing navigation services for TAY participating in SILP.

A TAY Direct Cash Transfer Pilot, which would have provided direct financial assistance and optional supportive services, was *not* recommended for funding in 2025-26 due to insufficient funds.

Opportunities for Policy, Practice, and Program Improvement

Multiple opportunities emerge from this current assessment of programs to further support foster youth and prevent homelessness as they exit foster care:

❶ Fund a centralized, youth-centered housing navigation tool. Foster youth and providers alike face confusion navigating the array of programs, especially given differing eligibility criteria. A user-friendly digital tool, co-designed with youth, could help all actors better understand real-time housing options specific to each youth's circumstances. In conjunction with this, the County can develop and disseminate clear, culturally relevant materials that provide information to youth, empowering them to build independence. More dedicated youth navigation support (including peer navigators) could also enhance current services by offering personalized guidance.

❷ Begin earlier review and planning of case closure decisions, including transitions to extended foster care. Early planning allows time for warm handoffs, lease acquisition, or program enrollment. Existing data systems could be used to track youth and their housing access post-exit to better identify where gaps or breakdowns occur. Further, the County is currently working on building out prevention infrastructure with the recent Title IV E changes to the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), which now allow

DCFS-managed funding to implement prevention evidence-based practices.[19] Supporting the development of this pathway can enhance prevention success across the County.

❸ **Expand access to flexible financial assistance.** Even modest financial setbacks can destabilize youth. Increasing access to cash-based supports and reducing bureaucratic aid restrictions will help address the increasing cost of living in LA County and will set up youth for success, ultimately preventing future homelessness.

❹ **Explore housing models that reflect youth preference, developmental stage, and local affordability.** Foster youth need more than short-term subsidies; they require developmentally appropriate, longer-term support that promotes economic stability into their twenties. Housing options should prioritize stability and trauma-informed supports, and include private or semi-private units, family housing, and scattered-site options. Shared housing models can reduce isolation and cost while offering support that it tailored to foster youth. Expanding housing models specifically for foster youth, with options such as peer-led living, co-housing, or step-down levels of support, can align with individual youth preferences and readiness for independence. These models can ease transitions into permanent housing options.

❺ **Scale what's working**: program quality and depth, rather than volume of caseload. High impact programs emphasize relationships, trauma-informed practices, and individualized support. Organizations should invest in provider training and technical assistance and embed youth voice in continuous improvement and site-level learning.

❻ **Strengthen access to FYI vouchers and Homekey sites through targeted advocacy and systems change.** Centralizing administration, reducing paperwork barriers, broadening eligibility, and enhancing support may help increase successful uptake of these opportunities for foster youth.

❼ **Recommit to the LAHSA DCFS/Probation Liaison program to strengthen cross-system coordination.** The LAHSA DCFS/Probation Liaison program holds strong potential to close coordination gaps between these three systems and prevent youth homelessness. Respondents note that this program has been hampered by blame-shifting since its launch. The County should recommit to this partnership by clarifying roles, addressing operational barriers, and establishing shared accountability for housing outcomes. With the right structure and support, the liaison model can streamline housing pathways, directly connecting youth in need, and helping close coordination and funding gaps.

❽ **Prioritize intensive, evidence-based training that centers the lived experience of foster youth, particularly as they navigate adult systems.** Training should emphasize modeling positive adult relationships and building trust, two critical components that are often lacking for foster youth. These approaches can help close the developmental gaps that make it harder for foster youth to achieve lasting housing stability.

❾ **Embed specialized legal supports to protect foster youth housing access.** Foster youth often face complex legal and bureaucratic challenges, such as disputes over housing access, eligibility determinations, or lease protections. Embedding legal support, especially foster-youth focused, can help protect youths' housing, help them navigate systems, and ultimately empower them to have more autonomy over their lives.

Conclusion

Preventing homelessness among foster youth in LA County requires a bold, coordinated, and person-centered approach. A clearer understanding of program eligibility is essential, but support must also extend beyond securing housing. Youth need access to robust mental health care and financial literacy and assistance, and a greater emphasis on education and employment readiness—skills that not only help them transition out of programs but also sustain housing stability over the long term. Young people exiting foster care are motivated and capable, but they need systems that meet them with flexible and respectful support that honors their lived experience and provides real opportunities for stability and growth. With continued innovation and investment—including Measure A, stronger coordination around FYI vouchers, and renewed leadership at DCFS—LA County is well positioned to lead the nation in dismantling the foster care-to-homelessness pipeline.

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- Safe Place for Youth (SPY)
- Sycamores
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