



# Foster Together Network 2021-2022:

*Embracing Our  
Values, Growing  
Our Impact*

FosterTogetherNetwork.net

Center for Strategic Partnerships



## EMBRACING OUR VALUES

### *GROWING OUR IMPACT*

In 2021-2022, Foster Together Network embraced and lived out our values: centering foster youth and parent voices, ensuring inclusivity and balanced power, and holding to our core belief in the power of data-driven cross-sector collaboration. This year, data guided us to focus on improving both the quality of care available for transition-age foster youth with complex behaviors and the matching technology needed to connect those youth to the right family for their needs.

Carrying our power thoughtfully, we've consciously sought to ensure youth and parent voices have a prominent seat at the table in our trainings and committee meetings. We remain intentional in hiring youth with lived experience and seeking their input in order to accomplish real change. This approach has unearthed new opportunities to improve outcomes for youth in care – top on the list, growing greater mentorship for transition age youth. Last but not least, this year we have extended our network to include State and National partners, as described more fully below. We're proud to say we have walked our talk this year and lived by our values, with wonderful results!



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I woke up this morning with Foster Together Network on my mind. I was thinking about the first time you invited me to speak at your event, and how empowered I felt afterward. You all created a space where caregivers are not only heard, but valued.

Thank You!

- Nicole Trimble, Foster Parent

# Data-driven Collaboration:

## Optimizing Youth Access to Family-Based Care

Building off “A-ha” revelations from its 2021 data analysis, FTN honed in during 2022 on how technology helps – or hinders – finding the right family match for each youth. Data told us that youth taken away from their families are too often placed long distances from their homes, or with families that are not a clinical fit, resulting in challenges for visitation and reunification, and causing re-traumatizing placement disruptions. This challenge is most acute for TAY and other youth with complex needs.

In 2022, DCFS and its FTN partners researched, evaluated, and then worked to improve the technology solution it uses to make placement matching decisions for children. We came up with BINTI as the best solution. With FTN’s support, DCFS has applied for funds to expand its current contract with BINTI (as its RFA technology provider) to include access for its foster family agencies (FFA) and the addition of BINTI’s Placement and Matching module. This change would improve the County’s ability to recruit, approve and retain resource families, and will vastly improve youth-resource family matching capability so that we can match youth more effectively into stable home-based care close to their home, community and school, instead of relying un-necessarily on congregate care settings or unstable placements.

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This past year has given DCFS great inspiration in partnerships with FTN to support the collective effort to improve technology and other resources dedicated to the placement of foster youth. Foster Together Network is a critical framework that has the tenacity to bring the issues forward, and resiliency to help the solutions come to fruition.

- Kym Renner  
Deputy Director, Los Angeles County DCFS



### Quality Care Models

FTN’s data-driven approach also steered the network toward a focus on improving family-based care for transition-age youth (TAY) with complex needs. A major placement crisis hit in 2021 that proved in raw and uncertain terms what the Network had already observed through its new DCFS-FTN Community Dashboard and begun to work on—that our County suffers a shortage of families and models to adequately meet the needs of these youth.

This year we were able to host several presentations and discussions with important stakeholders to examine complex care options, such as SOS Villages, Intensive Services Foster Care (ISFC) recruitment, Public ISFC model buildout, Mockingbird, and more. DCFS is pursuing funding options for many of these, including Mockingbird and Public ISFC, and Supervisorial District 5 is working with others to bring SOS Villages to the Antelope Valley.



### Improving Stability

Additionally, as we continue to respond to data showing that frequent placement disruptions are pervasive and detrimental to foster youth, we are thrilled to report that we have officially helped launch a pilot in South LA to reduce the untenable number of moves between foster homes that youth experience. FTN pulled together several partners to fund this cross-sector pilot under leadership of Dr. Eshelle Williams. Supporters include Supervisor Holly Mitchell, the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, Rose Hills Foundation, W.M. Keck Foundation and DCFS. With their support, Dr. Williams, several community foster family and mental health agencies (Children’s Bureau of Southern California, Dangerfield Institute of Urban Problems, Guardians of Love, Hannah’s Children’s Homes, Masada Homes, Nuevo Amanecer Latino Children’s Services, Wayfinder Family Services), DCFS, DMH, FosterParentCollege.com, UCLA Academy for Workforce Excellence, and Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) have collaborated to develop curriculum and a tight partnership to test new framing, training, resources, and practices to avoid these retraumatizing moves.



# Strengthening Mentorship

There's been a lot of talk around mentorship in 2022 – especially for youth of color. Youth have consistently voiced mentorship as a top desire and need; in fact, in a recent survey done by Think of Us, youth identified *“support being connected to a professional in the career I want to work in”* as their #1 need. In 2022, FTN began taking action on those youth voices, as well as the voices of resource parents who similarly have emphasized the crucial difference that peer mentorship has in their success.

FTN partner Pritzker Foster Care Initiative led the way with a vision to host a Spring Series that would ignite investment in quality mentorship for foster youth. Building off the wisdom of youth, parents, and innovative mentorship organizations, FTN hosted the Connections series with that goal in mind. It also hosted collective brainstorming, prioritization, and action planning around opportunities to lift quality, expand access, and nurture collaboration around mentorship enhancement. Several next steps are in the works, such as Master Classes, training on workforce coaching, and fundraising to support County-wide strategic planning in this space. There is a lot of kinetic energy building and we are excited to push this work forward in efficacious and impactful ways!



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“If we have heard it once we have heard it a hundred times – non-profits need to collaborate...As a social sector, we are stronger when we prioritize clear, supportive alliances for supporting youth in care.

- Jorie Das  
Executive Director, Fri1ends of  
the Ch1ldren Los Angeles



## Achieving Equity in Care

Each of the efforts described above also have the potential to ameliorate disparities in outcomes in our system. Improving the volume and stability of resource family homes for youth with complex needs is crucial if we are to be successful in reducing racial disparities, as we know Black youth are over-represented among this group and face disproportionately adverse outcomes. Data indicates that Black foster teens are more likely to be moved between foster homes or placed in institutional care; these moves and institutional placements cause additional trauma and affect life outcomes. LGBTQ youth are also over-represented in our system. Better technology and enhanced models will allow us to do better in ensuring home-based placements are clinically responsible, culturally responsive, affirming and stable from the beginning. Mentorship similarly can play a transformative role in improving outcomes for Black youth and others who all too frequently experience disparities and discrimination.

Moreover, with funding support from the W.M. Keck Foundation, the FTN Equity Workgroup was able to follow through on its commitment to hosting Courageous Conversations in 2021-2022, hiring the UCLA Pritzker Center to facilitate focus groups and research on the perspectives of youth, parents and staff regarding racial equity issues. The results of this research are anticipated in late Summer 2022, and the group is already starting discussions regarding trainings, policy changes, and toolkits that may flow from that learning!

## State & National Growth

Over the past year, FTN has also sought to enhance alignment between its local Los Angeles efforts and changes happening at the State and federal levels. The Network added executive leadership from the California Alliance of Caregivers as a Co-lead; this addition is helping us build stronger bridges between State-level advocacy, resources, and policy changes and our local collaborative efforts. With our upcoming events—including our 2022 Fall Conference, which is being launched in partnership with RaiseAChild—we seek to extend our collective brainpower to include leadership making bold and innovative foster care moves outside of California.

In addition, FTN co-founders, the Center and the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, highlighted FTN as part of its Chronicle of philanthropic system change in Los Angeles and has been sharing that spotlight and building relationships around it at conferences nationwide. While each region has particular needs, ultimately, improving the current quality of life and future prospects for children is a goal we share across the nation. These connections will help us both to grow the resources and know-how needed to optimize care locally and to maximize the well-being of children no matter where they live. And that is a purpose that fills FTN with excitement, eagerness, and gratitude!



Join us in achieving  
radical change.

To learn more or get involved, please check out [fostertogethernetwork.net](https://fostertogethernetwork.net) or contact the Center for Strategic Partnerships at [rochelle@socialimpactadvisory.com](mailto:rochelle@socialimpactadvisory.com)