



A YEAR TO CELEBRATE

As we celebrate this momentous 5th year(!) of Foster Together Network, we are thrilled to share the many ways in which FTN is hitting new milestones of youth impact. We are so grateful to the leadership at DCFS, and to our fabulous community, County, philanthropic, and youth leaders, without whom these successes wouldn't have happened.

Most prominently, FTN kicked off new collaborations to support TAY Youth—including Mentorship and Tech & TAY Initiatives that improve how our system supports TAY through mentorship and technology respectively. It also embedded deeper youth co-leadership into both these efforts and our Equity work and backbone team.

But that's not all – partners improved the recruitment of caregivers and the quality of caregiving. Efforts included releasing the Courageous Conversations report with UCLA, launching Courageous Actions tools (including FTN-produced videos and resources), underwriting childproofing to aid parent approval, and exploring upstream solutions to reduce TAY and LGBTQ youth homelessness. We celebrated the graduation of our Improving Stability pilot into Phase II, which will take the new models to scale in partnership with DCFS, DMH, and FFA partners. We also celebrated the collaboration between Fostering Unity and DCFS to find, stabilize, and grow purposeful placements for youth with complex needs.

We couldn't do this work without you—it is a collective labor of love, and we are eager to see where we together will take things in our next 5 years!

Rochelle Alley,
Center for Strategic Partnerships FTN Director

Center for
Strategic
Partnerships



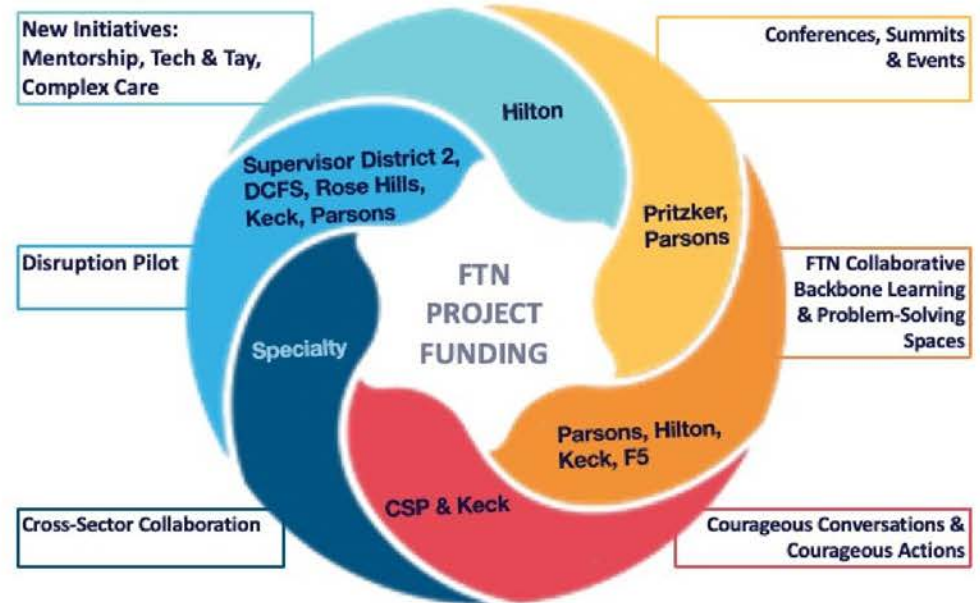
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NETWORK

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

WITH DEEPEST APPRECIATION

We are so grateful to our philanthropic and public funders who have stepped up to fund our phenomenal backbone team and the pilots and initiatives that partners birthed together around FTN tables this past five years:

- Conrad N. Hilton Foundation**
- Department of Child & Family Services**
- First 5 LA**
- Pritzker Foster Care Initiative**
- The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation**
- Rose Hills Foundation**
- Specialty Family Foundation**
- Supervisorial District 2**
- Weingart Foundation**
- W.M. Keck Foundation**



TAKING STABILITY TO SCALE

The Creating Stability During Change (CSDC) Model of Practice is an integrated approach to family foster care and mental health services; it is strength-based, mission-driven, family-systems centered, and trauma-informed.

The model aims to improve family stability, prevent resource-family disruptions and increase retention. It gives voice and inclusion to all resource family members, as well as members of the child welfare, mental health, and other interdisciplinary teams.

We are excited to share:

- **Capacity Building:** 96 public and private agency staff and 49 individuals were trained in CSDC. Before training, 90% of resource parents reported not knowing how to prevent disruptions; post-training, 98% of parents say they enhanced their skill set for preventing disruptions.
- **Stability & Permanency:** 53 of 55 youth were able to achieve stability and stay in their resource home; the remaining 2 successfully reunified.
- **Retention:** 38 of 39 families stayed on as resource families; the last family proceeded with guardianship of a child in their care.
- Participating Resource Parents share that their commitment to continue fostering is high despite the challenges they experience; this training is helping them feel “valued, respected, and heard.”
- **Scale:** Most exciting, the model has gained DCFS approval for funding to expand from the initial SPA 6 pilot geography to implementation with other offices and geographies!

Kudos to Dr. Eshale Williams who leads this work and all the public and private agencies involved (including FFA partners plus Supervisorial District 2, and the Keck, Rose Hills, and Parsons Foundations who funded the pilot!)



A COLLABORATIVE WIN

In 2022, Foster Together Network plunged into action by collectively solving a micro-issue and making a macro-splash impact. DCFS Deputy Director Kym Renner brought to FTN the issue of relative caregivers for whom the sole impediment to caring for their kin was the need to safety-fence their pool. Winnie Wechsler from the Pritzker Foster Care Initiative enlisted the help of Glen Friedman and Wade Trimmer of Change Reaction.

Change Reaction worked with DCFS to set up a system for philanthropically funding pool safety for relatives. Check out the heartwarming excerpts from one grandmother whose guardianship of three grandchildren was in jeopardy, and who was able to be helped through this quick-response collaboration.



Letter from a Grateful Grandmother

I would like to take this time to commend Ms. Regina King and Ms. Thalia Castellanos for helping me to keep my three grandchildren in my home... My home had to undergo an inspection to assure the kids would be safe. A major barrier was my pool. I knew there was a possibility that it had to be fenced; I hired a person who collected a down payment and never returned. My worries and anxiety were over the charts.

When Ms. Thalia came the first time, I had no more money to fence the pool. Ms. Thalia said, "Do not worry!" Within two weeks, I received a call from Ms. King who stated the fence was going to be installed at no cost to me. This was a reminder to me that there are still good kind people who are willing to go out of their way to keep families together. My faith was fully restored from this generous gift.

Thank you to all the people who were involved in helping my grandchildren not live another traumatic experience.

I will forever be grateful.

Launching Transition Aged Youth Initiatives



The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation is graciously supporting two FTN initiatives focused on improving the lives of Transition Age Youth (TAY) in care: the Mentorship and Tech & TAY Initiatives



Summit attendees taking copious notes



A bird's eye view of the Fostering Mentorship Connections Summit @ Japanese American National Museum

Transition-Age Youth Mentorship Initiative


This initiative aims to build Mentorship into a practice of excellence for all youth involved in Los Angeles County systems. Under the guidance of an Advisory Board composed of leadership in County departments, non-profits, philanthropy, and youth with lived experience, the initiative completed a landscape analysis and strategic plan for LA Mentorship and hosted the Fostering Mentorship Connections Summit in April 2023.

In the coming year, the initiative will provide seed funding and support for three goal areas identified during this past year's strategic planning process:


- 1) Development of a new county-wide mentorship network that will define and support a standard of excellence, values, and best practices among all Mentorship organizations and county entities serving systems-impacted youth in Los Angeles County.
- 2) Adoption of technology to improve how youth and partners access mentorship resources in LA.
- 3) Expanding the capacity and availability of responsive mentorship services in LA for system involved youth.



Tech & TAY:
Leveraging Technology to better support Transition Age Youth



In order to fully participate in our increasingly digital world, foster youth need technology to access resources necessary to thrive and support positive relationships. Yet, an alarming number of our youth struggle to get consistent access to technological tools, and those who do have access still frequently lack knowledge of how to navigate available resources online. COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the digital divide for systems-impacted youth.



Aiming to remedy this dire situation - and building off a commitment among FTN partners to integrate the voice of lived experience into system planning - the Tech and TAY Initiative piloted a deeper approach of co-creation, bringing on a board of former foster youth to unpack and build solutions to this problem at every step of the process, from research to recommendations. These youth leaders surveyed and interviewed a broad audience of system-impacted youth and technology experts regarding how we might reshape technologies into valuable tools with which youth-in-care thrive. In so doing, it provided a new model for offering youth a seat at the table. Keep your eyes peeled in July for the Tech & TAY final report and Youth-led Recommendations Tip Sheet – which shares insights related to both technology and youth co-leadership.



FROM COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS TO COURAGEOUS ACTIONS

This year kicked off with the release of FTN's [Courageous Conversations study](#) - conducted in partnership with the UCLA Pritzker Center - which identifies how to improve the experiences of Black youth in foster care.

The study unearthed, that for Black youth, supporting physical care & cultural identity is a crucial and often overlooked part of the well-being pillar of the child welfare system's mission.

Some caregivers declined to take in Black youth due to lack of knowledge about caring for their hair and needs, an unacceptable inequity that must be addressed.

Specifically:

- Participants highlighted hair and skin care as directly connected to the success or disruption of the caregiving experience.
- Caregivers expressed concern about a lack of preparedness or support with resources and cultural understanding to take care of the physical and emotional needs of Black youth.
- Non-Black caregivers expressed concern about connecting with the culture and identity of Black youth and how to keep Black youth in their care related to their racial identities - a failing equally noted among Black youth.



In response, FTN Equity Workgroup launched Courageous Actions to improve the experiences of Black youth in the foster care system:

- The FTN backbone team created a narrative change and training video in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) to ignite a paradigm shift regarding Black hair and skin care.
- DCFS Training division, Out-of-home Care division, UCLA and FKCE partnered to develop cultural training for all staff and caregivers across the DCFS system.
- CA Alliance of Caregivers partnered with the FTN backbone team to enhance the [tools and resources](#) available on their website and expand the awareness and use of their virtual hair support.
- Workgroup partners, DCFS Public Affairs, and the backbone team collaborated to share out messaging and resources.
- A Cultural Brokers program is being created to facilitate conversations about race and culture among staff, caregivers, and youth, and to organize in-person options for hair coaching.
- A pilot to test coaching of DCFS staff around cultural support is in development.



PROGRAMS ON THE MOVE

EVERY YOUTH DESERVES A HOME

The FTN Cross-Sector Workgroup (co-led by Specialty Family Foundation, CA Caregivers, and DCFS) has been diligently working on identifying ways to move upstream to disrupt the trajectory of transition-age youth in child welfare ending up unhoused. Strategically, the workgroup narrowed its focus to improving placement and permanency. Currently, the workgroup is partnering with the Director of Los Angeles County Probation Child Welfare Placement Permanency & Quality Assurance, who is leading the county's Systems Improvement Plan (SIP) to elicit community members, youth, resource parents, and non-profit organizations to help improve permanency for all foster youth.

In tandem, the workgroup hosted an expanded group of philanthropic and community partners in June to explore opportunities to support LGBTQ+ youth, a particularly vulnerable subpopulation of child welfare identified by DCFS leadership as at risk of homelessness. The cross-sector participants identified three leading opportunities to better find identity-affirming resource homes for LGBTQ+ self-identified youth, as well as to support all resource parents in providing more affirming, welcoming care.

IMPROVING FFA TECHNOLOGY

Last, but not least, the FTN Data Workgroup's years of exploration and advocacy has yielded a new commitment by the Department of Children and Family Services to sponsor BINTI Resource Family Approval technology for its foster family agency partners.

This is a huge step forward in improving our system's capacity to recruit new resource families. It also will help us to have better system-wide access to data to inform strategies for further honing our effectiveness in recruiting and retaining families.

Many thanks to all involved, including Karen Richardson, Andrya Markham-Moguel, Kym Renner, DCFS BIS (Business Information Services) and the Pritzker Foster Care Initiative for your tireless advocacy to bring this to fruition.

