Center for Strategic Partnerships

foster together NETWORK

2026 ANNUAL REPORT

Building on Strong Foundations

The challenges we face are constantly evolving. This collaborative — our collaborative — has consistently risen to meet those challenges with brilliant minds and open hearts.

Some of the innovations we birthed are now funded programs. Others are now concretized in policy. Some are just beginning.

All of it matters.

This year included notable expansion into birth-five impact, growth of innovative models of care, progress in enhancing sustainability for DCFS and its community partners, continued commitment to addressing disparities, and successful State-level advocacy.

We don't take your partnership for granted. We are ever grateful to the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Specialty Family Foundation, and The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation for your support, and to all our partners for your dedication and resilience. Thank you for being at the table — and for everything still to come.

In solidarity,

Rochelle Alley,
Director, Foster Together Network
Consultant, Center for Strategic Partnerships

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BUILDING SUSTAINABLE, IMPROVED CAPACITY:
Innovative Models of Care

Fewer children are entering foster care today than five years ago, a real measure of what prevention, family preservation, and reunification efforts can achieve.

The children who do enter care, however, have greater challenges on average, and the agencies who support them are in acute need of sustainable funding to keep doing that work well. A huge boon is California's new Innovative Model of Care (IMC) foster care rate which presents a significant opportunity for foster family agencies to develop models that will sustain the level of care these children need.

Getting IMC approval is a significant application process requiring the intersection of clinical clarity and organizational readiness. FTN provided the kind of hands-on technical assistance that turned an opportunity into a viable application. This began with co-designing with FFAs and DCFS, an IMC model specifically for youth with developmental or medical disabilities and complex needs, which included training, staffing, and clinical support plans.

FTN encouraged additional FFAs by hosting a virtual briefing to spotlight how leading agencies had innovated and leveraged new funding streams. For agencies that were ready, FTN then helped translate their ideas into viable applications—sharing tools one-on-one and helping them work through program development and application questions.

Los Angeles County now has state IMC approval for **eight** nonprofit models, with eight more in development. Approved models span **educational support, expectant parents, CSEC, LGBTQ+, ISFC+, and other high-risk populations**. Models in development include a focus on **fatherhood and children birth to two**. Each approved model is a commitment—to serve a specific population with the ingenuity they deserve.

9 INNOVATIVE MODELS OF CARE NOW APPROVED

"FTN walked alongside us every step of the IMC process — leading a workgroup to develop a new model of care for Regional Center youth and providing one-on-one support on the application. They brought the right people together, kept us focused on what matters most, and turned what could have been an overwhelming process into a real opportunity to innovate."

- Luis Mendez,
Ninos Latinos FFA

ADVOCACY & PHILANTHROPIC MATCHMAKING

Bolstering Community Caregiving

FTN further helped grow the breadth and sustainability of community-based care for foster youth by:

- nurturing philanthropic investment in solutions
- advocating at the State level
- providing data and funding analyses to drive shared focus among stakeholders, and
- sharing solutions.

Partner Matchmaking

FTN arranged $150,000 in philanthropic funds (thank you, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation & Anthony Pritzker Family Foundation!) plus matching public funding for a Therapeutic Family Care pilot with Fostering Unity. This model proved wildly successful in reducing runaway behavior and increasing the stability in family-based care for youth who otherwise would be in shelters, hotels, or on the street. When a new need arose related to home damage caused by foster youth, FTN sprang into action and was able to arrange additional funding – thank you, Specialty Family Foundation – to cover that unforeseen cost, helping preserve and heal host families.

FTN also helped secure over $1,000,000 for strength-based activities, transportation, and respite for foster youth, plus over $400,000 in long-term planning assistance to help sustain those supports under the new Tiered Rate Structure, Medi-Cal, and other funding streams. Again, a *deep* thank you is due to the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation for these two meaningful investments.

KEEPING KIDS IN FAMILIES:

As of January 1, 2026, no youth are placed in shelters or hotels.

SUCESSFUL LAUNCH OF FOSTERING UNITY THERAPEUTIC FAMILY HOMES

- 20 families onboarded
- 9 of 11 TFH youth stable in home
- Reduction in runaways; increased health and school engagement

OVER $1,700,000 IN PHILANTHROPIC FUNDS FOR SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT

"We are truly inspired by the incredible commitment that FTN demonstrates in harmoniously aligning philanthropic, public, and community resources to transform and elevate care for our children! Their unwavering support during critical moments is nothing short of remarkable—they are not just thought partners and connectors, but also passionate advocates who wholeheartedly believe in this vital mission alongside us!"

Dorothy Daniels, CEO, Fostering Unity

“FTN is really good at bringing like-minded partners together who will commit to pursuing a common goal, advancing an initiative or completing a project that will make life better for children and families. It’s their data-informed, collaborative approach that makes FTN stand out – they don’t just gather folks around a table to talk, they incite us to move things forward and make meaningful progress."

-Brandon Nichols, Director, DCFS

State-level Advocacy

When FTN’s funding analysis revealed a problematic complication with dual agency rates that in effect decreased funding for community-based foster family agencies caring for children with special needs, FTN jumped into advocacy mode, communicating with both local and State-level partners to modify. We are happy to share the advocacy was successful and the State agreed to adjust the rates.

FTN has also been participating in State-level advocacy around Strengths funding anticipated as part of the 2027 rate structure and will continue to stay active in this space through implementation.

Funding and Need Analysis

FTN augmented its initial funding assessment by adding a child placement analysis in early 2026. This analysis gave the child welfare community (FFAs, DCFS, and partners) a clearer picture of where resources, capacity, and changes are most needed. Several opportunities surfaced to improve both organizational finances and youth care, including Medi-Cal's Enhanced Care Management (ECM) and the State’s Innovative Model of Care (ICM).

Disseminating and Nurturing Solutions

FTN hosted several convenings to move information from the policy level into the hands of FFA leadership. In addition to the briefings on IMC, Medi-Cal, and placement referenced earlier, sessions covered State rate reform developments, merger and consolidation support, and a town hall with Director Nichols.

BIRTH TO FIVE: Broadening the Lens, Sharpening the Focus

"For the past year or so, Rochelle and the FTN team have been a critical support as the emerging DCFS Young Children in Care Birth to Five program develops. Rochelle has been a strong thought partner in strategic planning, understanding the importance of this period of development, and engaging and advocating philanthropy for their support in birth to five work both within DCFS and around Los Angeles County."

Danielle Rivera, LCSW, IFMHS, RPF II Continuous Quality Improvement Division, Birth to Five

FTN's work has historically centered on the children most underserved by the system—addressing disparities and challenges through cross-sector collaboration. With that spirit in mind, we broadened our focus this past year from youth with complex care needs to more closely look at improving outcomes for children from birth to age 5.

Children ages 0-5 accounted for 56% of removals in 2024, compared to 30% in the general population, and a full 100% of child deaths with DCFS history. More than half (64%) of youth ages 15-17 later classified as high-risk or complex-needs were first known to the system at or before age 5. We know from this data how critical this window of vulnerability is in determining a child's trajectory; these youngest years involve unique risk factors and opportunities to improve family connections, safety, and well-being. Recognizing this reality, the LA County Board of Supervisors approved a motion directing DCFS to develop a fully operational Young Children in Care Birth to Five Program, convening First 5 LA, the Department of Public Health, the Office of Child Protection, LACOE, and community partners around a shared early childhood strategy.

FTN collaborated with the DCFS Young Children in Care leadership to hone how philanthropy and community partners can best be woven into this important work. The resulting 0–5 vision integrates three mutually reinforcing efforts. The first is a workforce capacity-building initiative aimed at improving front-line safety assessments and family support for children 0–5. The second involves helping successful community partners access philanthropic and public funding pathways, including Family First, Medi-Cal, and state funds, to move toward scale and sustainability. The third centers on equity-focused community-based prevention and reunification support, as explained further on the following page.

The Center's FTN leadership co-hosted two briefings related to this population. The first was co-hosted with the Child Well-Being Funders Collaborative and Southern California Grantmakers in April 2026 with over 40 attendees and included a spotlight on the community-based prevention pilots. The second was co-hosted with the Partnership for Early Childhood Investment in May 2026 and homed in specifically on DCFS capacity-building and community-partnership efforts.

ADDRESSING DISPARITIES

Birth to Five Fatherhood Support

This focus on birth to five also was woven into FTN's efforts to address the disparities that remain prominent in our system. This past year, the role of fathers—and our all-too-frequent failure to engage and support them, especially when children are young—came into the spotlight.

Research and practice both point to the same conclusion: When Black fathers of young children with open DCFS cases have culturally competent support, both reunification rates and family stability improve. The solution that partners honed in on leveraged past successful use of cultural brokers to support Black parents, augmenting it with 0-5 and father engagement intentionality. It connects Black fathers of children ages birth to 5 to cultural brokers at the investigation phase to prevent family separation. If a child is removed from the home, the program provides support to accelerate safe, timely, equitable reunification.

Spearheaded and funded by Casey Family Programs, this newest initiative, named Strong Foundations, is already underway in the Compton/Carson and Lancaster areas. Strong Foundations brings together Center of Hope, A New Vision for You, Del Aire Baptist Church, and Love, Dad community leaders with DCFS cultural brokers, fatherhood, and birth to 5 leadership—bridging lived experience, cultural broker, early childhood, and systemic expertise to better engage and support fathers during this crucial time.

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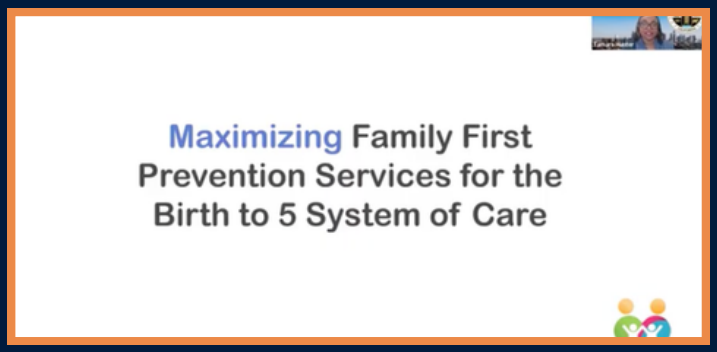
YouTube

Every initiative in this report started as a conversation.

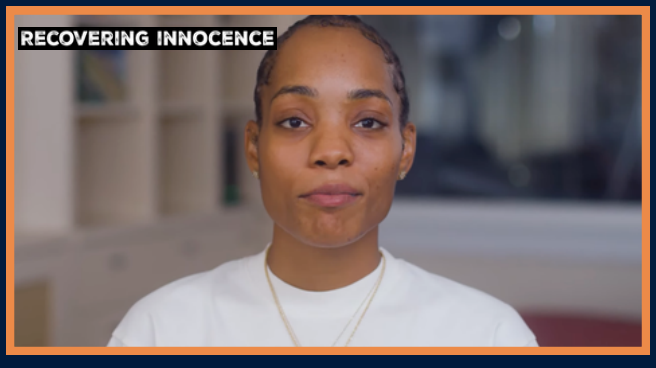
Our YouTube channel keeps a record - from quarterly meetings and DCFS town halls to briefings and trainings held over the years. Feel free to click on the images to the right to view some of our favorites from this past year.

Some past meetings and briefings are unlisted. Please feel free to inquire if a particular meeting might be available by contacting fostertogethernetwork@socialimpactadvisory.com.

Explore the channel here.



FTN YOUTH SPOTLIGHT: *Recovering Innocence*



Recovering Innocence is a film about, for, and produced by foster youth in front of the camera and behind. FTN was able to support funding for youth leaders to be part of screening conversations, and we hope to spread the word about this youth-led project.

TEASER