

Cross-System Coordination

Multiple public agencies support foster youth as they navigate the transition to adulthood. The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Foster Youth Strategic Initiative funds efforts to strengthen cross-system coordination, to enhance data collection and integration, and to use data and research to drive decision making.

Impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 pandemic has propelled public agency and private partners to build on existing relationships and work together in new ways to meet the needs of transition-age foster youth, while highlighting ongoing challenges to achieving effective coordination. While some ongoing research has experienced delays, grantees and public agencies have created and fielded surveys to identify youth and caregiver needs during the pandemic. These efforts have also expedited data sharing for operational purposes.

Coordinated service delivery across systems

Youth-serving systems partnered in new ways to respond to transition-age foster youths' needs during the pandemic. Cross-agency partnerships between the child welfare, education, and postsecondary systems, in coordination with grantees such as **iFoster**, distributed technology to youth in foster care in **LA** and **NYC** for distance learning. Education and postsecondary institutions in **California** also issued a joint statement to allow flexibilities and to support the transition from high school to postsecondary education.

While many cross-agency partnerships continued in 2020, others stalled because of the pandemic. Cross-system partnerships initiated in 2019 continued in **LA**, including the universal process for child welfare agency staff to refer foster youth to county workforce programming and continued outreach to school districts to sign on to the transportation cost-sharing agreement and coordinate information and notifications to support school stability for youth when their placements change. In **NYC**, the Interagency Foster Care Task Force issued its final report on the status of its recommendations, all of which have been embedded in the child welfare agency's strategic plan. Grantees **One Degree** and **Fair Futures** partnered to launch the first ever searchable directory of resources for youth in **NYC**. However, efforts such as cross-agency case consultations to support parenting foster youth in **NYC** were paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the **NYC** Disconnected Youth Task Force

Spotlight: Youth advocates help sustain public funding

With several public programs threatened by budgetary constraints during the pandemic, grantees partnered with youth in **LA** and **NYC** in successful advocacy campaigns. In **NYC**, youth played a central role in restoring the budget for **Fair Futures** to \$12 million by testifying at a budget hearing, signing a letter of support (more than 1,140 youth), and participating in virtual town halls. In **LA**, the **Opportunity Youth Collaborative** partnered with youth to testify before the Board of Supervisors, successfully sustaining \$20 million in funding for the Youth@Work program.

issued a report on supporting youth who are neither in school nor employed long after its legislatively mandated due date.¹

Data collection and integration

Public agencies expanded their data collection and reporting in 2020. In NYC, the child welfare agency has enhanced its reporting on specific populations of youth in foster care, including parenting youth and crossover youth. LA's largest school district now reports a range of outcomes for youth in foster care (e.g., median number of schools attended per year, number of students earning partial credits). The Cal-PASS Plus data system, which links education and postsecondary data, now provides wage data for exiting students with foster care experience, and grantees continue supporting state and local efforts to link and report data for foster youth.

While progress continues, data gaps remain. Both jurisdictions lack comprehensive and regularly reported data on key indicators of progress, including school stability (LA), postsecondary entry (NYC), postsecondary completion (LA and NYC), and employment (LA and NYC). Efforts are underway to address many of these gaps, including the Cradle to Career data system in California highlighted in the spotlight box, and data linkages and analyses underway by the **Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI)** in the Office of the Mayor of the City of New York. Some of these efforts have been delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which public agencies have prioritized and expedited information sharing to facilitate timely responses to the pandemic, while research projects experienced delays.

Spotlight: Grantees support development of new “Cradle to Career” data system

California's Cradle to Career data system will link pre-K, K-12, community college, four-year university, and workforce data. Grantees including **Children's Data Network**, **John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY)**, and the **Opportunity Youth Collaborative** are supporting its development and ensuring that the system reports data on current and former foster youth as a subpopulation.

Research and data-informed decision making

To coordinate timely and targeted responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, grantees administered surveys to understand the real-time needs of foster youth and their caregivers. In California, **iFoster** surveyed youth who received technology through their organization to learn how they have used the devices and their needs during the pandemic. **JBAY** surveyed campus support programs to understand ongoing technology needs and the impact of the pandemic on student enrollment. The **Alliance for Children's Rights** surveyed caregivers in LA, and NYC's child welfare agency surveyed foster parents and provider agencies to identify caregiver needs.

The Initiative's grantees continue to generate new knowledge that public agency stakeholders and grantees use to inform their work. Ongoing research by the **University of Chicago's CalYOUTH** team and **Children's Data Network** continues to illuminate the experiences of transition-age foster youth in California and LA, with stakeholders regularly referencing their studies. The **California Child Welfare Indicators Project** launched its new website to continue providing state- and county-level child welfare data to the public, while complying with new state requirements to protect child/youth confidentiality. In NYC, **Fair Futures** completed its new Care4 database platform that will standardize data collection, allow provider agency staff to create customized reports, and capture key data elements related to education, employment, and housing. At the national level, **FrameWorks Institute** concluded its multiyear research project in 2020, culminating in a strategic brief that provides concrete recommendations on specific narratives that grantees and the broader field can use to advocate for transition-age foster youth.

¹ NYC Disconnected Youth Task Force (2020). *Connecting Our Future*. <https://cye.cityofnewyork.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/DYTF-Connecting-Our-Future-Report.pdf>

Looking ahead

As state and local leaders are forced to make difficult fiscal decisions during the economic downturn, advocates stressed that data and research will be essential for communicating the importance of services and supports for foster youth. By continuing to advocate for enhanced cross-system coordination and data sharing and by generating new knowledge through research studies and surveys of evolving youth and caregiver needs during the pandemic and in future recovery efforts, the Initiative can fill information gaps to enable informed decision making at all levels.

For more information on progress made toward accomplishing all the Initiative's objectives in 2020, see the Foster Youth Strategic Initiative 2020 Evaluation [Report](#).