



Foster Youth Strategic Initiative
2017 Evaluation Report

Executive Summary



Prepared for: Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

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Executive Summary

Overview

The Conrad N. Hilton Foster Youth Strategic Initiative (the Initiative) grew out of an extensive research and synthesis process that included the perspectives of a wide variety of stakeholders. Ultimately, the process helped the Foundation better understand the challenges facing transition age youth (TAY) and identify successful models for change; this work became the foundation for the Initiative. In February 2012, the Board of Directors approved the Initiative and it launched in March 2012. The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) component began in March 2013.

The Initiative focuses on TAY 16–24 years old from two regions with large child welfare (and foster care) populations: Los Angeles County (LAC) and New York City (NYC). The Foundation chose to focus its efforts in LAC and NYC due to the strong commitment of the public child welfare and supporting agencies to issues affecting TAY, their readiness for policy and system reform, and opportunities to leverage funding.

To address the myriad issues facing TAY, those in care and transitioning out of care, the Foundation provides grants to organizations and entities with the potential to meet the three overarching goals to: (1) increase **TAY self-sufficiency**, (2) strengthen and increase **cross-system collaboration** and promote **systems change**, and (3) develop and disseminate **new knowledge** about the needs of TAY and effective strategies for meeting those needs.

As of June 2017, the Foundation has awarded \$55 million to Initiative grantees. This report includes updates on the activities of 38 current grantees: 23 grantees are working in LAC, 12 grantees are working in NYC, and 10 grantees are considered “dual geography” as they conduct work in both LAC and NYC. In the past year, two LAC grantees (First Star and iFoster) expanded their services to NYC, moving them into the dual geography category.

The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Component

Westat, in partnership with the University of California, Los Angeles Luskin School of Public Affairs, and Action Research Partners, is conducting the MEL component of the Initiative. The primary goal of the MEL is to inform the Foundation, its grantees, and

other stakeholders about salient learnings and accomplishments throughout implementation of the Initiative.

The Initiative is built on a theory of change that proposes that funding a strategic, three-component initiative (self-sufficiency services, systems change, and new knowledge development) will increase the likelihood of improving outcomes for TAY in LAC and NYC. The evaluation is not a program evaluation; that is, it is not designed to measure program outcomes at the grantee level. Instead, it focuses on the overall strategy and its ability to influence change in key youth, systems change, and knowledge sharing and leveraged funding goals.

For the last four years, the MEL team has implemented a multi-method approach to answer these four research questions:

1. Are TAY in LAC/NYC on a better path to success?
2. What impact did the Hilton Foster Youth Initiative have on the grantees' programs?
3. What changes have occurred in LAC/NYC in collaboration and alignment of systems serving TAY? How did the Initiative contribute to these changes?
4. What impacts did the knowledge grantees have on policy, practice, and research innovations?

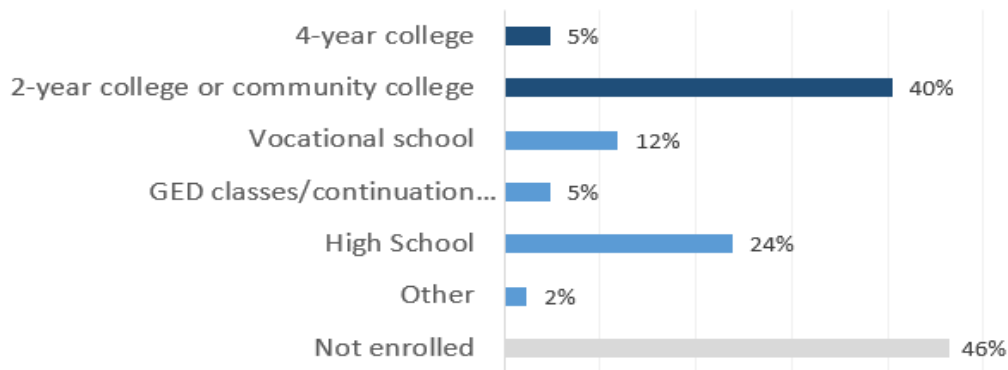
This report covers evaluation activities from August 2016 – July 2017, but also describes progress across the 4-year MEL span (2013 – 2017). Specifically, it covers findings from (1) grantee progress reports and data collection forms, (2) policy tracking activities, (3) the stakeholder survey; and (4) analysis of administrative and secondary data sources. It concludes with recommendations for moving the Initiative into Phase II.

Transition Age Youth Goals

First and foremost, grantees continue to make progress towards self-sufficiency goals, especially around improving educational outcomes for TAY. Over the last four years, Initiative grantees have developed innovative programs and supports to help TAY obtain a high school diploma or equivalency degree (HSE) and enter and complete

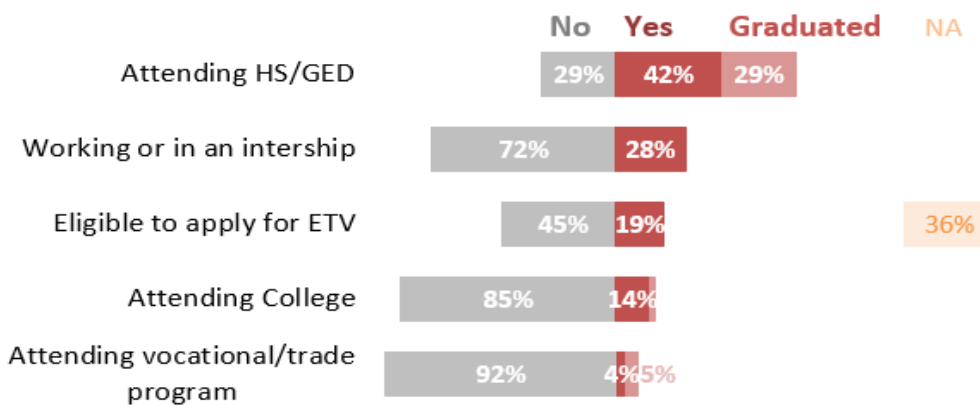
college or vocational training, including comprehensive academic assessments, tutoring, legal and educational advocacy services, and tuition waivers. In total, grantees have provided more than 5,000 TAY with education-focused services and supported almost 7,200 TAY with connections to material resources critical to school success (laptops, cell phones). Different from last year, when we reported that most foster youth were enrolled in school, this year, more youth graduated high school, and still ever increasing numbers of TAY are attending college, whether at a 2- or 4-year institution or vocational training program.

LAC CalYOUTH Participants' School Enrollment at Age 19



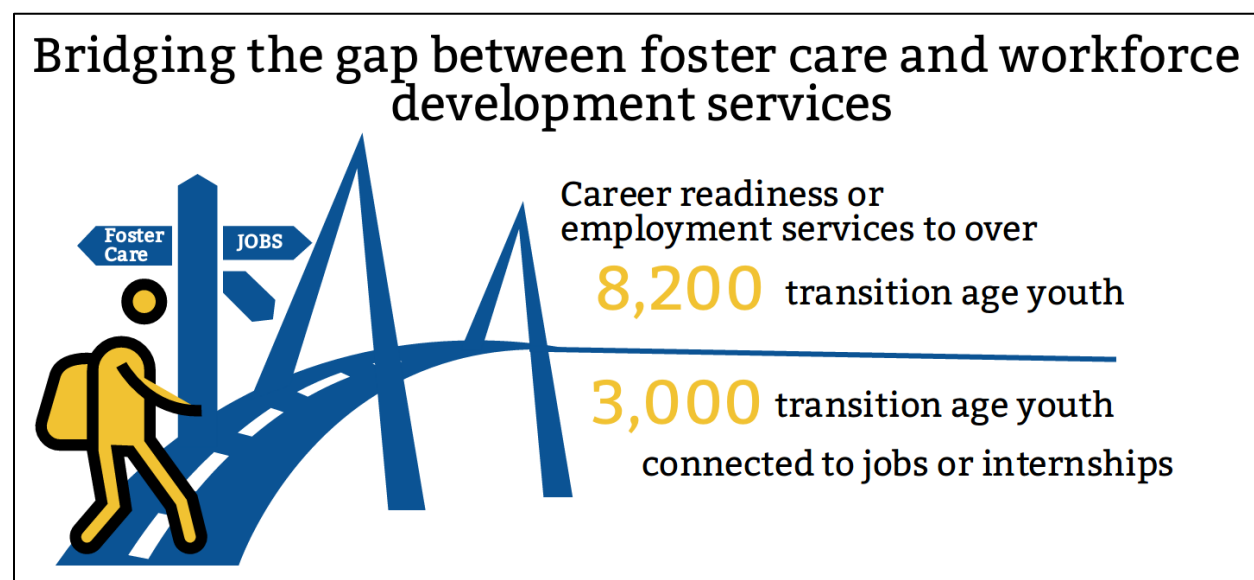
Data Source: CalYOUTH Study, Age 19: Selected findings for LAC, Table 24 (Courtney et al., 2017, p. 48). Percent of total youth calculated by Westat.

Education and Employment Outcomes for NYC Foster Youth Age 17-21 with a Goal of APPLA, 2016



Data Source: ACS Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA) database. Prepared by the Management Analysis & Reporting Unit, ACS, Feb 22, 2016. CY 2016 data as of May 5, 2017. PYA data are collected twice a year for youth in foster care with APPLA. Answers are based on the last PYA form completed for the youth in a year. N=2,388.

With regard to employment, grantees continue to bridge the gap that existed four years ago, when the Initiative began— to provide work readiness and workforce engagement programs specifically targeted at foster youth; grantees have provided over 8,200 TAY with career readiness or employment services, connecting almost 3,000 TAY to jobs or internships. The most significant effort has involved major collaborative work among Initiative grantees across jurisdictions; several grantees (e.g., LeadersUp, Alliance for Children’s Rights, and the LA Chamber of Commerce) joined the Aspen Institute’s Forum on Community Solutions 100,000 Opportunities Initiative as it launched in LAC. Aspen also tapped the Alliance for Children’s Rights to lead a cross-sector, multi-agency effort to improve education and employment outcomes for transition-age youth (TAY) by creating the Opportunity Youth Collaborative (OYC) that uses a collective impact approach, bringing together public agencies, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions and employers to leverage existing resources and maximize opportunities for young people out of foster care.



On the topic of pregnant and parenting youth, grantees also continue to make progress. Birth rates are declining in both LAC and NYC as grantees work to provide critical direct services to and advocacy services for these youth. They also continue to promote research around the particular risk and protective factor profiles of these youth, and identify strategies to intervene with them to promote more positive outcomes. In NYC, almost all pregnant and parenting youth (94%) can identify an adult as a “permanent connection” in their life, a critical resource for success.

Despite declines in the crossover youth population in NYC, crossover youth remain very vulnerable, demonstrating poorer outcomes than non-crossover youth in almost every category (e.g., mental health, educational outcomes). Over the last four years, Initiative grantees have primarily focused on systems reform and advocacy for these vulnerable youth, with Georgetown University Center for Juvenile Justice Reform expanding its Crossover Youth Practice Model into NYC and LAC, and such grantees as Anti-Recidivism Coalition and Public Counsel working on policy reform, community advocacy, and training court, DCFS, probation, and direct service workers about issues related to crossover youth. Finally, grantees Dr. Emily Putnam-Hornstein and Dr. Mark Courtney continue to shape the national research agenda around these two subgroups of vulnerable youth, as they expand their research under the Initiative, and disseminate findings nationwide.

Caregiver stability and support is a critical factor in helping TAY make the successful transition to adulthood. Over the four years of the Initiative, grantees' activities have included recruiting, supporting, and educating caregivers to promote a stable and supportive caregiver population. Since the Initiative began, grantees have reached thousands of youth, caregivers, and youth-serving professionals to provide information and training on foster youths rights and resources, including training: over 2,200 caregivers in how to advocate for their foster children; 3,600 child welfare, school, court

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER


Transition-age foster youth have many rights, services, and resources available to them.

However, many youth, caregivers, and other providers don't know about a youth's rights or how to access services and resources.

Since the start of the Foster Youth Strategic Initiative grantees have reached out to thousands of youth, caregivers, and youth-serving professionals to provide information and training on foster youth rights and resources


Nearly 20,000 youth received information on specific services and resources available to them

Over 2,600 youth were trained on understanding their legal and educational rights and how to advocate for themselves



Over 2,200 caregivers were trained on how to advocate for their foster children and support them in their goals

Over 3,600 child welfare, school, court, and other professional staff were trained on how to serve the unique needs of transition-age foster youth

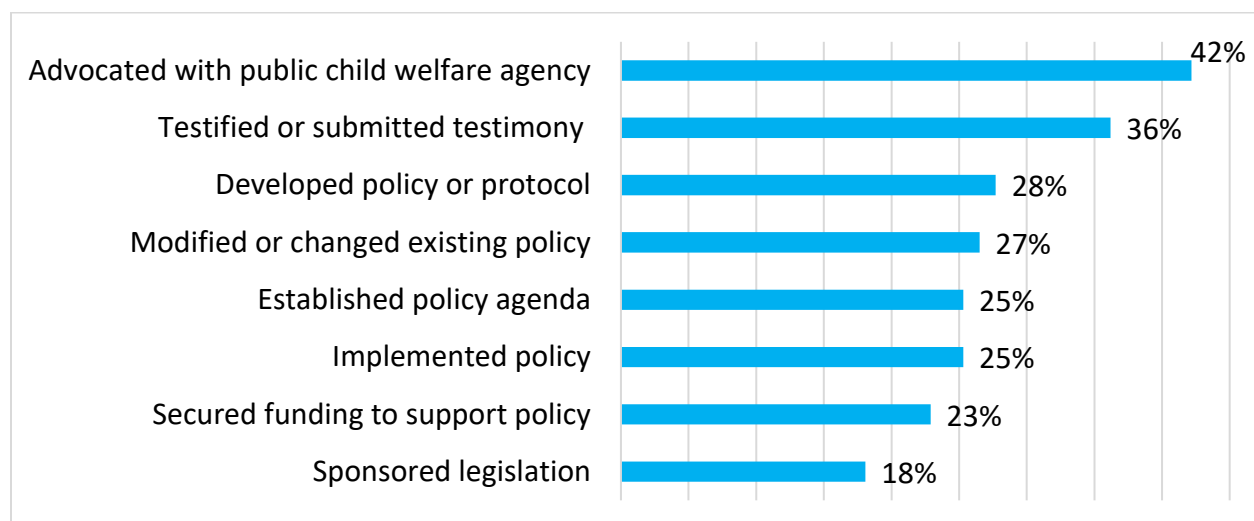


and other professional staff on how to serve the unique needs of TAY; and training or providing information to more than 25,000 youth around specific services and resources available to them, and to understand their legal and educational rights.

Grantees also continue to offer support to caregivers to understand and manage the special challenges of fostering TAY. For example, Children’s Aid Society created the Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting, hired a dedicated Teen Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention Specialist, and, based on caregivers’ requests, now offer professional certification classes and training opportunities for TAY caregivers, all in an effort to promote stable homes and permanent placements for TAY.

Systems Change Goals

Cross-sector coordination and collaboration is a persistent strength of Initiative grantees. Each year the MEL has assessed these two critical features, and each year they have gotten stronger. This year, we conducted a stakeholder survey with grantees and their partner agencies to capture their perspectives around key collaboration activities and outcomes. Findings indicate a robust network of grantees and partner agencies working together to achieve positive outcomes for TAY. Grantees indicate having impacted child welfare policy most commonly via advocating with public child welfare agencies (42%), testifying or submitting testimony regarding specific legislation (36%), and developing specific policies or protocols (28%). The stakeholder survey provides further evidence (first documented in the 2015 and 2016 social network analyses) of the Initiative’s continuing role in strengthening the infrastructure by which child welfare serving agencies in LAC and NYC collaborate around shared interests.



Advocacy remains one of the strongest areas of progress for the grantees. Grantees regularly participate in advocacy efforts to strengthen and improve child welfare (and related) systems (education, juvenile justice) locally and nationally. At the national level, iFoster worked with legislators to draft the Improved Employment Outcomes for Foster Youth Act (H.R. 2060) to allow employers to receive tax credits for hiring foster youth, opening up even more employment opportunities for them. Locally, last year, LAC grantees were directly involved in more than seven bills, each one designed to impact TAY either directly (AB1731, ensures parenting youth have access to child care vouchers) or indirectly (AB1371, guarantees legal counsel to parents before their children are removed from the home).

Current legislative advocacy work by Initiative grantees



Los Angeles

AB 2506: Places stricter rules on Chafee grants to prevent "predatory" for-profit institutions from taking advantage of foster youth

AB 766: Expands definition of SILP homes to include college dorms and permits direct foster care payments

SB 233: Expands and defines individuals who may access foster youth educational records

AB 1164: Provides short-term emergency childcare vouchers to caregivers, including parenting youth

SB 245: Increases access to sexual health education for foster youth, requires sexual health training for caseworkers, and ensures that youth's reproductive rights are met

AB 1371: Expands and upholds the rights of parenting foster youth to have legal counsel consultation before their children are removed

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New York City

Foster Youth College Success Initiative: Added to the FY2017 NY State budget (\$3 million) and Governor's Maintenance of Effort (\$1.5 million)

NYC Mayor: Signed five bills into law to address barriers foster youth face while in care and during the transition to adulthood

State legislature and City government: Working on the issue of housing for foster youth enrolling in college

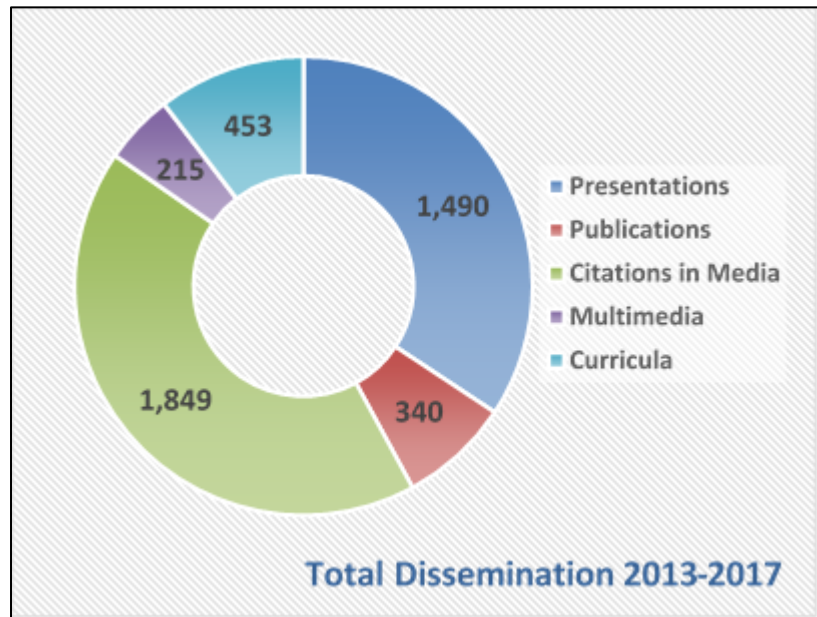
Grantees' advocacy work is important not only because it provides supports and services for TAY and their caregivers, but because it gives voice to TAY where it matters most—around policies that significantly impact their well-being. National Center for Youth Law is the backbone of a collective impact effort aimed at reducing unintended pregnancy among foster youth in LAC via the LA Reproductive HealthEquity Project for Foster Youth. The project aims to deliver evidence-based health education to

foster youth, caregivers, and judicial officers, among others. The leadership group includes other Initiative grantees—John Burton Advocates for Youth, Children’s Law Center, Public Counsel, Alliance for Children’s Rights, and Seattle Children’s Hospital—in addition to DCFS. Not only is this an important step towards achieving long-term social change for foster youth, but is another example of how the Initiative has created sustained collaboration among its grantees.

Knowledge and Funding Goals

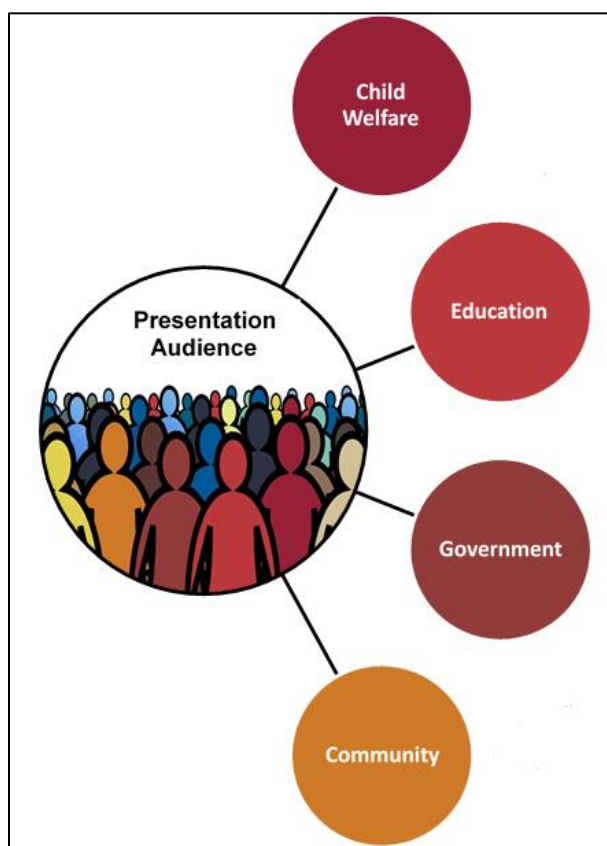
Grantees also continue to make enormous strides to disseminate knowledge about their work with the larger child welfare policy, research and practice communities and leverage funding to support this work; these, too, have been areas of strength for grantees across the last four years. It is important to recognize that dissemination can be considered another form of advocacy in that it is a tool by which grantees can engage and influence stakeholders and decision makers around issues important to child welfare, thus creating opportunities for far-reaching, positive impacts for TAY.

Over the past four years, grantees have made 1,490 presentations, authored more than 340 publications, been cited in the media 1,849 times, and produced 215 multimedia products and 453 curricula—advancing the reach of their efforts enormously. Contrast these numbers with those from the first year of the Initiative where grantees gave 188 presentations, authored 45 publications, and were cited in the media 57 times and one gets a sense of just how far the grantees (and the Initiative) have come.



Research grantees continue to produce and disseminate findings through both traditional (peer-reviewed journals) and social media and networking avenues (Twitter,

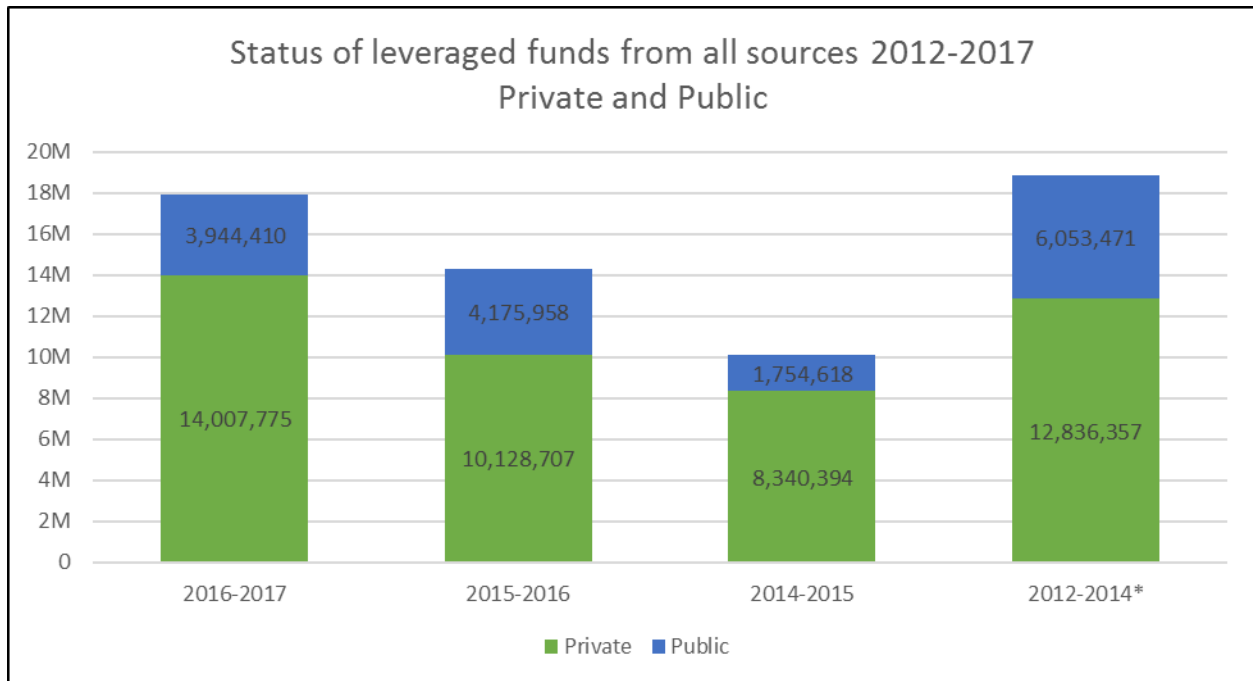
Instagram, YouTube, Google+, and Facebook); social media has enhanced the reach of the grantees and contributed to their nationally recognized work and reputation.



Research grantees also continue to promote their work through in-person meetings and briefings such as those conducted by Dr. Mark Courtney in May 2016 at the Transition Aged Youth Symposium in Davis, CA, and at a three-part webinar series on findings from the CalYOUTH study, presented in July (on housing), September (on education), and November (on physical and mental health) 2016; John Burton’s Understanding the Role of Data and CalPass Plus presentation to introduce colleges and other educational institutions to using CalPass data to identify foster youth and track their educational outcomes; and New Yorker’s for Children’s Home Away from Home workshop on using data to target foster home recruitment efforts. These venues provide an opportunity for information sharing, but also to promote

translational knowledge, an opportunity for researchers and practitioners to translate sometimes complicated findings into practical information that can be easily understood and adapted by non-researchers, including other grantees.

Finally, grantees have far surpassed leveraged funding expectations of \$20 million by reporting more than \$45 million in leveraged funding from private sources and more than \$16 million from public sources. This information alone demonstrates the pronounced impact the Initiative has had on grantees and TAY alike, but when coupled with the other progress highlighted in this report, it becomes more obvious that it has had a profound and lasting impact on the child welfare community, not just in LAC and NYC, but across the nation. As the Initiative moves into its second phase, it will be important to continue to build on this momentum, but also to refocus efforts on those areas where improvements are still necessary.



Recommendations

As the Initiative moves into Phase II, it is an appropriate time for the Foundation to both take stock of its achievements and determine how best to focus its future efforts; some of this work has already been done. Based on a variety of sources, including the 2016 MEL report, and interviews with grantees and other key stakeholders, the Foundation has built and received board approval for Phase II of the Initiative. Throughout this final report, we have highlighted the successes that grantees have achieved both in the past year and across the full four years of the Initiative—and they are substantial. However, we also highlight areas where work is still needed. Based on the information we have collected and reported on over the past 4 years, we make recommendations in the following four areas for taking the Initiative further and increasing its impact in the coming years:

- Build the evidence base for *what works* to improve educational outcomes for TAY
- Create more inroads into understanding the circumstances of pregnant and parenting youth, including fathers, and how best to serve them
- Continue to promote advocacy that results in strong policies and systems for TAY
- Improve the availability and accessibility of cross-system data to track outcomes for TAY.