

**ENSURING YOUTH TRANSITIONING  
FROM FOSTER CARE ARE  
CONNECTED BY 25:**



**LESSONS LEARNED FROM  
THE FOSTER CARE WORK GROUP**



### ***The Youth Transition Funders Group***

The Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG) was formed in 2001 by funders dedicated to improving the lives of our nation's most vulnerable young people. Foundations involved in YTFG are committed to achieving a common mission—ensuring that this nation's young people are successfully connected by age 25 to institutions and support systems that will enable them to succeed throughout adulthood. YTFG has adopted the theme, "Connected by 25," to describe this mission. A young person who is Connected by 25 has attained five critical outcomes: educational achievement in preparation for career and community participation, including a high school diploma, postsecondary degree and/or vocational certificate training; gainful employment and/or access to career training to achieve life-long economic success; connections to a positive support system—namely, guidance from family members and caring adults, as well as access to health, counseling and mental health services; the ability to be a responsible and nurturing parent; and the capacity to participate in the civic life of one's community. To achieve this mission, YTFG members are committed to working together, thereby enhancing the likelihood that investments from individual foundations will make a real difference in promoting young people's attainment of these outcomes. For more information about YTFG, visit [www.ytfg.org](http://www.ytfg.org).

### ***The Foster Care Work Group***

The Foster Care Work Group (FCWG) is one of three work groups of YTFG. The mission of FCWG is to ensure that all youth transitioning from foster care have lifelong family, personal, and community connections and the opportunities and tools to achieve economic success and well being. FCWG members work to coordinate and leverage investments that: help to build the capacity of communities to effectively support young people transitioning from foster care; strengthen federal and state policies for youth leaving care; and raise public awareness of the needs of youth currently in or transitioning from foster care. Together, members of FCWG are building a national movement of funders, community leaders, young people, policymakers, practitioners and researchers with a shared focus on supporting successful futures for foster youth.

FCWG accomplishes its collaborative work through a number of key strategies. Through FCWG, members have the capacity to:

- Share information about each member's priorities and investments related to youth in transition from foster care;
- Learn from their peers about each member's experiences, insights, and grantmaking;
- Develop common investment principles and practices that guide each foundation's grantmaking in a particular area of work;
- Develop a coordinated policy strategy to guide efforts at the federal, state and community level to improve programs and services and to increase public investments in addressing the comprehensive needs of youth in and transitioning from foster care;
- Coordinate grantmaking on select priorities and projects in which one or more members strategically aligns or coordinates its investment based on others' activities; and
- Co-invest in which two or more foundations jointly fund an initiative or project.

For more information about FCWG, visit [www.financeproject.org/special/practice/fcwg.cfm](http://www.financeproject.org/special/practice/fcwg.cfm).

### ***The Finance Project***

The Finance Project (TFP) is a specialized non-profit research, technical assistance and training firm for public and private sector leaders nationwide. TFP helps leaders make smart investment decisions, develop sound financing strategies, and build solid partnerships that benefit children, families and communities. TFP supports policymakers, program developers, and community leaders by providing: creative new ideas for policies, programs, and system reforms; comprehensive tools for identifying, refining, and expanding the use of promising practices; and effective policy and program tools to help clients identify needs and achieve goals. TFP provides staff support to FCWG. For more information, visit [www.financeproject.org](http://www.financeproject.org).

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# PREFACE: Reflections on Funder Collaboration

**Funder collaboratives have gained increasing attention and interest in recent years.** As foundation leaders continue to seek to identify new and creative approaches to extend the reach of their investments, particularly in challenging financial times, funder collaboratives offer a useful mechanism to amplify and enhance a single foundation's ability to make a difference in addressing complex issues and challenges.

The Youth Transitions Funders Group (YTFG) is a funder collaborative created in 2001 to improve the lives of the nation's most vulnerable young people. Foundations involved in YTFG are committed to achieving a common mission—ensuring young people are successfully connected by age 25 to institutions and support systems that will enable them to succeed throughout adulthood.

YTFG accomplishes its work principally through the efforts of three work groups focused on young people who have dropped out or have been pushed out of schools, those in the juvenile justice system, and those in and transitioning from foster care. The Foster Care Work Group (FCWG) brings together foundation leaders with a shared interest in preparing youth in foster care for their transition out of the child welfare system and affording them pathways to lifelong economic well-being.

In 2004, FCWG published *Connected by 25: A Plan for Investing in Successful Futures for Foster Youth*. *Connected by 25* made the case for helping foster youth become economically successful adults and outlined a bold agenda for foundation and government investment. The agenda recommended investments in:

- **community initiatives** to test and refine promising community-based programs and services;
- **research and evaluation** to answer questions about the status of youth in and transitioning from foster care; the availability, quality, and impact of innovative approaches to address their economic well-being; the costs, benefits, and financing of relevant programs and initiatives; and the implications of addressing economic well-being for the education and child welfare systems;
- **technical assistance** to help states, communities, and community organizations design, implement, and sustain promising models; and
- **communications, outreach, and advocacy** to mobilize support for investment to improve the economic well-being of youth in and transitioning from foster care.

Based on the recommendations in *Connected by 25*, among other activities, FCWG members launched an ambitious co-investment initiative in California, Florida, and Indiana to build the capacity of communities to effectively support young people in transition, initiate and strengthen federal and state policies for youth

leaving foster care, and raise public awareness of the needs of foster youth and of effective ways to help them become successful adults.

**Five years have now passed since the release of *Connected by 25*.** Much has happened within FCWG, within the co-investment communities, within the larger policy and economic context in which FCWG members are operating, and in the lives of the young people served by the *Connected by 25* sites. It seems fitting to take a look back at the experience of FCWG as a funder collaborative as well as at the lessons learned from the national demonstration.

The publication that follows describes the rich implementation experiences, promising approaches, and significant accomplishments of the leaders of FCWG's national demonstration—the *Connected by 25* Initiative. In addition to the critical lessons learned from the co-investment demonstration, the experience of FCWG as an active and engaged funder collaborative during the past six years also is an interesting story worth telling. This preface reflects briefly on the structure of FCWG, the value FCWG brings to its members, the challenges members have faced, the lessons FCWG members have learned, and the outcomes FCWG has achieved through its collaborative work.

## The Structure of FCWG

FCWG is made up of representatives from 10 to 15 diverse foundations. These include large national foundations, corporate foundations, regional foundations focused on specific programmatic priorities, and smaller family and community foundations.

Members of FCWG place a high priority on youth and alumni engagement. Since its inception, FCWG has included members who are alumni of foster care. Three alumni members served in the original group that created *Connected by 25*. Since then, FCWG has expanded the number of alumni members to six, including members who represent the *Connected by 25* sites as well as state and national youth and alumni organizations.

FCWG is led by two co-chairs who provide overarching guidance and direction for the collaborative. The funder collaborative uses a subcommittee structure to support specialized work and activities, as needed. Most collaborative activities are undertaken as a full group.

The funder collaborative holds in-person meetings twice per year and meets regularly through five to eight conference calls besides face-to-face meetings. The Finance Project (TFP) has provided staff support to FCWG since 2003. TFP facilitated and assisted in drafting *Connected by 25*. Since then, TFP has continued to serve in a staffing role for the collaborative, planning and facilitating calls and meetings; supporting group decisionmaking; and conducting specialized research, analysis, and tool development efforts.

## The Value FCWG Brings to Its Members

Members of FCWG identify several valuable benefits offered by the funder collaborative.

- **Creates a peer learning environment.** Members commonly cite the value of a peer learning environment to expand knowledge about issues related to young people aging out of foster care as well as a peer network to support learning about grant-making approaches and strategies.
- **Increases the credibility of individual foundations.** Many members, particularly those from smaller, local foundations, report that participation in a national collaborative increases the credibility and visibility of their foundation. Members of larger, national foundations also cite several benefits of participation, notably the ability to demonstrate to their grantees that they, too, “walk the walk” when it comes to collaboration.
- **Helps create other partnerships.** FCWG members note that connections to other foundations also help create new partnerships and collaborations, both in terms of direct funding partnerships outside the FCWG and connections to other research and advocacy organizations working in the field.
- **Increases resources.** FCWG brought together not only additional funding by leveraging investments by member foundations, but also new resources to support tool development, technical assistance, and research efforts in the field that would have been difficult for a single foundation to accomplish by itself.
- **Helps manage the risks and share the workload associated with identifying promising organizations for funding.** Throughout the planning and site selection process for the co-investment demonstration, FCWG members were able to jointly share the costs of due diligence as well the risks of launching a new national initiative.
- **Expands the foundation’s reach.** Many of the foundations participating in the funder collaborative focused on a slice of investments for youth transitioning from foster care, such as education or workforce supports. The broader agenda—as well as the shared investment pool—enabled many FCWG members to be a part of some programs and approaches that may not have been within the scope of traditional investment priorities of their foundation.
- **Enables funders to stay the course, even in light of shifting priorities** within individual foundations. A visible commitment to the FCWG’s co-investment agenda helped foundation leaders maintain support for critical grants supporting youth in or aging out of foster care, even as foundation boards were identifying new priorities and directions.



## Barriers and Challenges of Funder Collaboration

FCWG's progress has not come without challenges. FCWG members note several barriers and challenges they faced in fully participating in a funder collaborative and in moving collective ideas into common action.

- **Defining roles and boundaries.** Members needed to invest time in clearly defining what FCWG is and is not as well as in identifying how it is similar, but unique, from other collaborative efforts. Members continue to seek clarity around what is individual foundation work and what is the collective work of the group.
- **Creating collaborative goals and priorities vis a vis those of individual foundations.** Members of FCWG remain highly committed to the collaborative's goals and priorities, but individual foundation boards vary in their ability to see beyond individual investments and the power of leverage that is possible.
- **Challenges for alumni participation.** Every FCWG member is committed to having alumni members fully engaged in decisionmaking, but the group has experienced challenges in ensuring alumni members can effectively participate. Particularly for alumni members whose participation in FCWG is not part of their formal job responsibilities, the scheduling of meetings during school and/or work hours is problematic. The group continues to work to improve how it structures the collaboration to ensure ongoing and meaningful participation of alumni members.
- **Changes in collaborative partners.** The early successes of FCWG, including the development of the Connected by 25 investment plan, were predicated on a high level of trust and very strong relationships among members. Over the years, the group has experienced some turnover in the foundations participating and/or in the individual representing a particular foundation. New partners bring new vision, resources, and energy. However, the collaborative must continue to invest in and nurture those relationships.

## Lessons Learned by FCWG

Upon reflection of the more than five-year history of FCWG, members note several critical lessons learned about effective funder collaboratives.

- **A collective voice adds value.** Although individual member autonomy may be reduced, the value of a shared voice committed to a common agenda greatly strengthens the message.
- **A shared agenda and true partnership are possible if everyone is able and willing to compromise.** Each foundation came to FCWG with its own funding priorities. Through open and respectful dialogue, members were able to craft core recommendations that all could support.
- **A common agenda and vision can be established that still enables each foundation to develop individualized initiatives consistent with its values and policies.** *Connected by 25* provided a detailed investment agenda for the field, but it was structured broadly enough that each member foundation could identify its own priorities within the framework. Members could then choose to invest more intensely in one area or another while maintaining their support for the entire set of recommendations.
- **A clear, well-written document really helps communicate common purposes.** Many funder collaboratives spend significant time on crafting a collective agenda, but few of them invest in creating a written document that formalizes their recommendations. *Connected by 25* served as a highly useful tool for communicating the vision of the group, raising awareness of the collaborative's efforts, and influencing the investments of other public and private funders.

- **Relationships are critical.** Like many other funder collaboratives, the success of the group was predicated on the strength of the relationships among members. Members point to the strong level of trust in the room—particularly during the visioning phase of the collaborative—as a critical element of success.
- **The right people must be at the table.** To make decisions and move a collective agenda, the group needs people around the table that control their budgets and can act on behalf of their foundation.
- **Everyone’s voice matters.** FCWG included members from very large national foundations as well as those from smaller family foundations. The group structured decisionmaking to ensure every member’s voice was valued and everyone had a seat at the table.
- **The engagement of alumni members is invaluable.** Alumni are full members of the collective, and their contributions have significantly informed and influenced FCWG’s work and priorities. While other funder collaboratives have struggled to engage clients and/or providers of targeted services, the engagement of alumni members provides a useful case study of how to create effective structures for the consumer voice within funder collaboratives.
- **Staff support is essential to ensure consistency, focus, organization, and followup.** In the first few years of its existence, FCWG was largely staffed by its co-chairs. As the group moved into creating an investment agenda, members sought outside staff support to facilitate conversations and help draft *Connected by 25*. As the group formalized its structure and moved to implement its agenda, members secured dedicated staff to ensure FCWG could efficiently translate its collective vision into action, without overburdening any one member.

## Outcomes of FCWG’s Collaborative Efforts

During the past five years, FCWG has accomplished impressive outcomes for both individual members and the field at large.

- **Developed an agenda and a shared vision.** A critical outcome was a shared agenda and common vision for the work. Although the group’s thinking has evolved during the past five years, the core strategies and approaches identified in *Connected by 25* are still a relevant and useful framework.
- **Furthered collective learning.** Members note the learning opportunities provided by FCWG expanded their understanding and knowledge of issues related to youth transitioning from foster care and strategies for effective grant-making. FCWG also afforded access to national research and technical assistance, furthering members’ connections to other organizations.
- **Enabled members to coordinate work to minimize duplication and build stronger advocacy.** Through formal and informal mechanisms, members identified new ways to align their investments within a given region and to coordinate investments with related purposes. The coordination function enabled by FCWG served to extend the work of individual foundations through strategic partnerships and coordinated grant-making.
- **Created focus and highlighted the issue of youth aging out of foster care.** Five years ago, little national attention was focused on young people transitioning from foster care. Through collective, as well as related individual investments, FCWG helped focus the attention of policymakers and foundation leaders on the needs of this population.

- **Developed and articulated a new focus for promoting economic success and permanency for transitioning youth.** When FCWG created *Connected by 25*, few national organizations or child welfare agencies were focused on strategies for preparing older youth in foster care for economic success. *Connected by 25* created a new strategic direction for the field, one that expanded the goals of protection and safety to include economic success as a critical outcome. As members continued to learn and the field continued to evolve, FCWG has since added permanency to its framework. This comprehensive framework has served to raise the bar for investments in supports and services for youth transitioning from foster care. It also has increased expectations for the outcomes desired for young people leaving the foster care system.
- **Influenced the grant-making of other foundations.** The *Connected by 25* framework has influenced the design and implementation of other foundations' investments in youth transitioning from foster care. Several foundations, including America's Kitchen, have designed their initiatives based on the framework laid out in *Connected by 25*.
- **Influenced policy and practice.** In addition to influencing the investments of other foundations not participating in FCWG, the collaborative has shaped policy and practice within state child welfare agencies. For example, the Pennsylvania child welfare agency used the *Connected by 25* results statements and core strategies to design a request for proposals for its new initiative supporting older youth in foster care.
- **Leveraged new funding.** FCWG was able to generate significant investments from members in support of the *Connected by 25* Initiative. In addition, that initial investment has leveraged more than \$8 million in new funding supporting the *Connected by 25* demonstration sites. Leveraged funding far exceeds what any one foundation could ever contribute.

In the five years since the release of *Connected by 25*, FCWG members have learned many critical lessons about creating an effective funder collaborative as well as about designing and implementing a new comprehensive vision for youth transitioning from foster care. Collaborative efforts have resulted in impressive outcomes, including advancing members' knowledge; creating a new focus and vision for this population; influencing grant-making, policy, and practice; and leveraging new investments.

Yet FCWG's experiences as a funder collaborative during the past five years are only part of the story. This publication also offers an in-depth look into the rich experiences of the 11 *Connected by 25* demonstration sites. It offers critical lessons for funders, policymakers, and program leaders that can inform the ongoing development and enhancement of supports and services that help young people in foster care achieve successful outcomes. With the recent passage of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act and the continued focus of policymakers on the needs of older youth in foster care, the lessons learned, experiences, and models of FCWG and its national demonstration are likely more needed, useful, and relevant than ever before.





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## **During the past decade, leaders across the nation have increased their focus on the challenges faced by young people who “age out” of the foster care system.**

This focus has led to the passage of several supportive federal and state policies, new investments by public and private funders, and creative program development. The Foster Care Work Group (FCWG), an affinity group of foundation leaders focused on healthy transitions to adulthood for youth in foster care, has been an important vehicle for improving policies and practices affecting transitioning youth. In 2004, FCWG, with assistance from The Finance Project, published *Connected by 25: A Plan for Investing in Successful Futures for Foster Youth*. The report outlined an agenda for foundation and government investment to help youth in foster care make a successful transition to adulthood.

Based on the recommendations in *Connected by 25*, FCWG members launched an ambitious collaborative initiative in California, Florida, and Indiana. Eleven sites across the three states evolved in their own unique way, reflecting their different configurations of funders; their local policy and program environment; and the needs, strengths, and priorities of local stakeholders. This publication reflects on the key lessons learned through the first five years of the national initiative. Given the unique structure of the initiative, as well as the significant variation in how the initiative took shape across the sites, this publication is not intended to serve as a formal evaluation of the Connected by 25 Initiative. It tells the story of the rich implementation experience of the initiative—from conception and planning, to implementation, to influencing the larger service systems. It also highlights implications for funders, policymakers, public officials, and program leaders seeking to grow initiatives supporting youth transitioning from foster care.

## **Getting the Work Started**

Most site leaders initiated a comprehensive planning process that brought together stakeholders from several different systems and organizations, though the convening entity, the partners involved, and the timeframe for planning varied widely across the sites. Communities that were most successful in developing an effective and workable plan shared the following key characteristics:

- an understanding of and willingness to build on existing child welfare reform efforts;
- the buy-in of key child welfare agency leaders and alignment of their vision with the *Connected by 25* vision;
- a history of developing, as well as a willingness to develop, partnerships between child welfare and other community agencies;
- a lead agency with capacity to focus on the work, given competing priorities;
- a commitment to seeking and using the input of young people to shape the initiative; and
- a focus on using data on the status of young people to engage partners and shape priorities.

## Leading and Managing the Work

Site leaders developed a unique management and governance structure based on the local players involved. In some sites, the lead agency was the public child welfare entity; in other sites, a private provider or funder was the lead agency. All site leaders convened a governance entity that generally included an advisory board and a youth leadership board. The professional backgrounds and positions of the site coordinators varied; however, site leadership across the sites was marked by very little turnover, which helped ensure that sites could make steady implementation progress and build and maintain key relationships.

Lessons learned related to effective leadership and management include the following.

- Strong linkages between the child welfare agency and community partners are critical, whether the site lead is the public child welfare agency or a private partner.
- Consistent site leadership that takes an entrepreneurial approach to the work is a key to developing collaborative approaches and deploying resources in innovative ways.
- Significant ongoing involvement of funders in the governance of the initiative is an important factor contributing to success.
- An effective governance board structure that brings together the perspectives of young people, line staff, private providers, child welfare management, and leaders from other systems is critical.

## Implementing Supports and Services

The *Connected by 25* investment plan outlined five strategies to connect youth in and transitioning from foster care to resources that prepare them for economic success: advocating and supporting educational achievement; facilitating and creating access to workforce development opportunities; providing financial literacy education; encouraging savings and asset development; and creating entrepreneurship opportunities.

FCWG members originally envisioned connections to caring adults as an important factor running through all the strategy areas. As the work evolved in the sites, foundation and site leaders learned it was essential to explicitly emphasize building connections to caring adults. For this reason, permanency was added as a focus area across sites. Housing was not originally a primary strategy of the national *Connected by 25* Initiative. Given its importance to youth transitioning from foster care, it was later added as a focus area across many of the sites.

Site leaders learned important lessons on working to improve supports and services in each strategy area.

- **Advocating and Supporting Educational Attainment.** The 11 communities implementing the *Connected by 25* Initiative focused significant time and resources on supporting educational attainment among transitioning youth. Improving education success in the *Connected by 25* demonstration sites hinged on:
  - formalizing coordination efforts between the child welfare agency and targeted school districts;
  - collocating child welfare and education staff;



- coordinating and establishing working referral relationships with existing education support programs; and
- establishing and focusing on measures of shared accountability.
- **Facilitating and Creating Access to Workforce Development and Entrepreneurship Opportunities.** Sites varied in the degree to which they focused on and successfully created workforce development opportunities. Most of them did not make developing entrepreneurship opportunities a priority. Sites that were most successful in developing effective collaborations with workforce development:
  - engaged workforce development leaders early in the planning phase and maintained ongoing collaborative planning efforts; and
  - recognized the different cultures and priorities of child welfare and workforce development systems and persisted in identifying appropriate vehicles for coordination.
- **Providing Financial Literacy Education and Encouraging Savings and Asset Development.** Nine of the 11 Connected by 25 sites offered financial literacy training linked to asset development programs. Site leaders found it took significant time to design and implement individual development accounts (IDAs), but they were able to overcome barriers to make these accounts available. Critical strategies included:
  - seeking partnerships with the financial industry to collaboratively develop, implement, and sustain financial literacy and IDA programs;
  - engaging youth in financial literacy training as co-facilitators; and
  - working to institutionalize financial literacy training and guidance on saving into existing supports for youth aging out of care, such as Independent Living training programs and ongoing case management.
- **Developing Safe and Affordable Housing Options.** Many sites have made housing a priority in their logic models and implementation efforts. Site leaders have found that to build effective housing supports, it is necessary to look beyond the child welfare system for expertise and partnership. Key strategies for developing housing supports for youth transitioning from foster care include:
  - forming partnerships with diverse stakeholders, such as public housing authorities, private housing developers, and nonprofit housing providers;
  - maximizing funding by increasing knowledge of and access to often-complex housing streams through partnerships with those in the housing community to ensure initiatives align with housing funds; and
  - developing creative housing options that also facilitate the development of lifelong connections, such as host family models in which youth reside in a safe and stable household of a supportive family member, permanent connection, or other caring adult.
- **Supporting Permanent Connections.** Permanency is the foundation that supports all five Connected by 25 strategy areas. The manner in which Connected by 25 sites have approached permanency varies depending on the site structure and leadership. Strategies that sites have employed most successfully include:
  - working to change casework practice to ensure case managers working with youth are focused on identifying lifelong connections in partnership with young people; and
  - aligning with complementary initiatives that address permanency in the state or community that may have a broader focus than youth but can bring critical tools and technical assistance to youth-focused work.

## Influencing Systems, Policies, and Practices

Contributing to the development of supportive public policies and changing the way public systems approach work with transitioning youth is an important focus of the Connected by 25 Initiative. Across the sites, leaders have improved coordination among public systems, contributed to the development of more supportive state and local policies, and made child welfare practices more youth-centered and collaborative. Lessons learned across the sites include the following.

- Leadership and investment by private funders play a critical role in fostering local influence on systems, policies, and practices.
- Policy changes do not ensure improvements in practices, but they can provide mandates, resources, and/or accountability mechanisms that help local leaders change practices.
- The flexibility of private dollars is important to supporting the innovation needed to change public agency practices.
- Communicating the successes of promising models in pilot communities can influence policy and practice through replication.

## Leveraging Resources to Sustain the Work

Site leaders have leveraged resources to support the short-term implementation of the pilot efforts. Moreover, they have successfully institutionalized many components of the work into public child welfare systems, including new practice approaches and enduring collaboration with other public and private agencies. The long-term outlook is less certain for sustaining functions that have been more difficult to institutionalize, such as support for IDA match funding and for staff dedicated to coordinating the work. Lessons learned include the following.

- Public- and private-sector partners have different strengths and can play complementary roles in leveraging funds if clear roles and responsibilities are articulated.
- Maintaining forward momentum in partnerships depends on institutionalizing services in a manner that maintains clear ongoing roles for public- and private-sector partners.
- The strong focus by policymakers and funders on supports for youth aging out of foster care has increased the number of players offering supports and services to this population in local communities and underscores the need for intermediary entities that can coordinate multiple local efforts.

## Implications for the Field

The recent federal Fostering Connections legislation creates new requirements for health, education, and permanency supports for young people in foster care and extends Title IV-E eligibility for foster care placement and case management services, adoption and guardianship assistance to young adults until age 21. This landmark legislation creates an opportune moment for promoting efforts to support youth transitioning from care. The lessons learned in the five years since FCWG members launched the demonstration initiative have important implications for funders, policymakers, public officials, and program leaders working to grow this important field.



- **Funders.** Funders interested in replicating the successes of the demonstration initiative or in promoting system reform should take these steps.
  - Consider how their leadership and ongoing engagement can influence policy and coordination and increase the reach of their grant-making.
  - Partner with other funders to increase the reach and impact of foundation initiatives. One factor that contributes to a successful partnership is a shared vision and logic model that are broad enough to enable funders with varying programmatic and geographic emphases to work together. Another factor is an ongoing structure so funding partners can continually assess and adjust their coordinated efforts.
  - Make a careful assessment of what data are available and how difficult it will be to access existing data at the outset of initiatives targeting transitioning youth. Then establish realistic timeframes and budgets for data collection if evaluation is a priority.
- **Policymakers.** Across the *Connected by 25* communities, several legislators and public agency leaders emerged as champions of efforts to develop supportive public policies and public agency practices that better support successful outcomes for young people transitioning from foster care. Their involvement suggests policymakers and public agency officials should consider the following actions to contribute to successes for this population:
  - seek avenues for substantive and ongoing input by young people in the development of policy, regulatory, and programmatic changes;
  - ensure policies translate into improved practices by providing adequate funding, flexible funding, and accountability measures;
  - seek out public-private partnerships with foundations, community agencies, and businesses interested in reform efforts; and
  - promote coordinated services among public systems by establishing the formal systems, processes, and agreements needed to support successful coordination.
- **Program Leaders.** Those who manage and staff child welfare programs at public and private agencies are key players in making the *Connected by 25* vision a reality. The *Connected by 25* work suggests that program leaders wanting to contribute to improvements in practice for youth aging out of care should:
  - assess the degree to which program practices support real youth engagement and leadership and make improvements, if necessary;
  - take a proactive role in influencing policy by tracking and contributing to legislative debates and ensuring young people contribute to those debates; and
  - align and institutionalize privately funded work with public systems to contribute to sustainability.

FCWG members launched the *Connected by 25* Initiative to engage diverse stakeholders in communities nationwide in testing the strategies presented in the *Connected by 25* investment plan. Clearly, they have succeeded in that endeavor, creating new awareness, new champions, and new and innovative program models focused on youth transitioning from foster care. With the continuing interest of policymakers and passage of supportive federal and state legislation, the initial *Connected by 25* vision and investment plan are perhaps more relevant than ever. The experiences of the demonstration communities offer valuable lessons to inform the continued development and expansion of supports that help young people in foster care achieve successful outcomes.

# INTRODUCTION

**During the last decade, policymakers, program developers, advocates, researchers, and funders have placed new emphasis on the challenges faced by young people who “age out” of the foster care system.** Research has documented the overwhelmingly negative life outcomes experienced by youth left to fend for themselves at age 18. Advocates, young people central among them, have highlighted the limitations of the child welfare system in preparing youth for adulthood and the need for services to extend beyond age 18. These efforts have contributed to the passage of several supportive federal and state policies, new investments by public and private funders, and creative program development.

The Foster Care Work Group (FCWG), an affinity group of foundation leaders focused on supporting healthy transitions to adulthood for youth in foster care, has provided an important vehicle for promoting, supporting, and coordinating efforts to improve policies and practices at the national and state levels. FCWG is one of three work groups of the Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG), a collaboration of foundation leaders dedicated to improving the lives of the nation’s most vulnerable young people. In 2004, FCWG, with assistance from The Finance Project, published *Connected by 25: A Plan for Investing in Successful Futures for Foster Youth*. *Connected by 25* made the case for helping youth in foster care become successful adults and outlined a bold agenda for foundation and government investment. An important premise was that as public child welfare systems grapple with their mandate to provide protection for all children in their care, preparation for independence and adulthood is given too little attention.

Based on the recommendations presented in *Connected by 25*, FCWG members launched an ambitious national initiative to build the capacity of communities to effectively support young people in transition from foster care. FCWG members have supported 11 *Connected by 25* sites in California, Florida, and Indiana. Five years after *Connected by 25* was published, a look back at the growth and development and successes and challenges of the national initiative is warranted. The unique evolution of work in each of the sites, proceeding from the *Connected by 25* blueprint, offers rich lessons for funders, advocates, policymakers, and program developers interested in continuing to build the field of initiatives supporting young people transitioning from foster care. This publication highlights successes and challenges in the planning and development, program implementation, partnership development and structure, and influence and leverage achieved through the projects.



The publication begins with an overview of the Connected by 25 sites and the initiative's theory of change. It then summarizes reflections on lessons learned from the initiative in five areas:

- getting the work started;
- leading and managing the work;
- implementing supports and services;
- influencing systems, policies, and practices; and
- leveraging resources to sustain the work.

The publication then concludes with implications of the work for funders, policymakers, and program developers. The research approach and interview protocols are presented in Appendix A. The logic model is provided in Appendix B. Appendix C profiles each Connected by 25 site's history, funding, organizational structure, and approach to work.

# THE CONNECTED BY 25 SITES

**The *Connected by 25* investment plan included a logic model developed collaboratively by FCWG members.** The logic model outlined core results and five strategies members considered critical to support economic success and, ultimately, life success for young people transitioning from foster care (see Appendix B). Following are the five strategies included in the logic model.<sup>1</sup>

- **Advocating and supporting educational attainment**—participation in academic, instructional, enrichment, and support programs and activities that help vulnerable youth become lifelong learners, complete high school, and pursue and complete the postsecondary education or skills training they need to become employed in their chosen field.
- **Facilitating and creating access to workforce development opportunities**—the continuous development of skills, knowledge, and work habits that promote the employability of youth to help them get and retain stable jobs, advance beyond entry-level positions, and pursue self-supporting careers.
- **Providing financial literacy education**—participation in instructional, enrichment, and support programs and activities to help youth acquire critical financial knowledge and skills, including developing budgets, managing money, obtaining credit, paying taxes, planning for the future, and responding to unanticipated financial problems and crises.
- **Encouraging savings and asset development**—the continuous development of skills, knowledge, and opportunities to enable vulnerable youth to increase their personal income and accumulate material assets, such as a car, a home, savings accounts, financial securities, retirement funds, and ownership interests in property and other items of value.
- **Creating entrepreneurship opportunities**—the process through which vulnerable youth can gain an awareness of business ownership as a viable complement or an alternative to employment, develop ideas for a business venture, learn how to start and grow a successful business, and write and implement a business plan.

FCWG members and site leaders also have recognized that an important foundation for success in all five strategy areas is developing **permanent, lifelong connections to caring adults** who can offer ongoing support and guidance to youth. For this reason, since the publication of *Connected by 25* in 2004, relational permanence has emerged as another important focus for the Connected by 25 Initiative. In addition, site leaders have recognized and prioritized the need to link young people to **safe and affordable housing** as another key focus. Finally, while this publication focuses on lessons learned from the Connected by 25 sites, in virtually all sites FCWG members have invested in complementary approaches, such as advocacy efforts or evaluation activities.

<sup>1</sup> *Connected by 25* presented a broad national logic model that included the five outlined strategies. As multiple states implemented the Connected by 25 Initiative, specific strategies and approaches evolved in each site.

## CONNECTED BY 25 SITES AT A GLANCE

| Demonstration Site and Lead Agency                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Funders                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Key Partners                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Core Strategies                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>California Connected by 25 Initiative</b><br/>Includes 8 county sites throughout California:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Fresno</li> <li>■ Glenn</li> <li>■ Humboldt</li> <li>■ Orange</li> <li>■ San Francisco</li> <li>■ Santa Clara</li> <li>■ Solano</li> <li>■ Stanislaus</li> </ul> <p>The county child welfare agency acts as the lead agency in each of the 8 counties.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Stuart Foundation.</li> <li>■ Walter S. Johnson Foundation.</li> <li>■ William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.</li> <li>■ Annie E. Casey Foundation.</li> <li>■ Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ California Family to Family Initiative.</li> <li>■ Goldman School of Public Policy.</li> <li>■ County child welfare agency in each site.</li> <li>■ Local partners in participating counties:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Independent Living Program;</li> <li>□ school districts;</li> <li>□ workforce investment boards;</li> <li>□ juvenile courts;</li> <li>□ health care providers;</li> <li>□ mental health services;</li> <li>□ transitional and supportive housing providers;</li> <li>□ families and caregivers; and</li> <li>□ young people in and formerly in foster care.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ K–12 education.</li> <li>■ Employment/job training/postsecondary education.</li> <li>■ Financial competency and asset development.</li> <li>■ Housing.</li> <li>■ Independent Living Skills Program.</li> <li>■ Personal/social asset development.</li> <li>■ Permanency.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <p><b>Florida Connected by 25</b><br/>Includes 2 county sites in Hillsborough and Brevard Counties. Connected by 25 state office is lead agency.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Eckerd Family Foundation.</li> <li>■ Lumina Foundation for Education.</li> <li>■ Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.</li> <li>■ Hillsborough County School District.</li> <li>■ Junior League of Tampa Bay.</li> <li>■ Conn Memorial Foundation.</li> <li>■ Community Foundation of Tampa Bay.</li> <li>■ Triad Foundation.</li> <li>■ Lerner Family Foundation.</li> <li>■ United Way of Tampa Bay.</li> <li>■ Lightning Foundation.</li> <li>■ Annie E. Casey Foundation.</li> <li>■ Community donations and grants.</li> <li>■ Eckerd Youth Alternatives.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Florida Department of Children and Families.</li> <li>■ Hillsborough County                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Community Alliance;</li> <li>□ school district;</li> <li>□ juvenile court;</li> <li>□ Child Welfare Community-Based Care Agency (Hillsborough Kids, Inc.); and</li> <li>□ Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County.</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Brevard County                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ school district;</li> <li>□ child welfare community-based care agency;</li> <li>□ county Independent Living provider;</li> <li>□ community programs;</li> <li>□ youth in care and those aging out of care;</li> <li>□ foster parents and caregivers;</li> <li>□ community and state advocates;</li> <li>□ workforce development agencies</li> <li>□ Hillsborough County community colleges, universities; and</li> <li>□ vocational-technical programs.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ High school guidance counselor for youth in care.</li> <li>■ Alternative Adult Basic Education/General Educational Development school for youth in care.</li> <li>■ Cross-system court for youth involved in foster care and/or juvenile justice.</li> <li>■ Policy to Practice Academy.</li> <li>■ Opportunity Passport.</li> <li>■ Housing.</li> <li>■ Postsecondary education/vocational supports.</li> <li>■ Workforce training, employment preparedness.</li> <li>■ Permanency.</li> <li>■ Social/interest development.</li> <li>■ Transportation.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Indiana Connected by 25</b><br/>Includes Marion County site. United Way of Central Indiana is lead agency.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation.</li> <li>■ Lumina Foundation for Education.</li> <li>■ Indiana Department of Child Services.</li> <li>■ Indianapolis Private Industry Council.</li> <li>■ Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.</li> <li>■ Annie E. Casey Foundation.</li> <li>■ Casey Family Programs.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Indiana Department of Child Services.</li> <li>■ Marion County, Indiana Department of Child Services.</li> <li>■ Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis.</li> <li>■ Indiana Workforce Council.</li> <li>■ Private child welfare providers serving Marion County.</li> <li>■ Private housing developer.</li> <li>■ National City Bank.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Education.</li> <li>■ Employment.</li> <li>■ Housing.</li> <li>■ Physical and mental health.</li> <li>■ Financial competency/increased opportunities.</li> <li>■ Personal and family connections.</li> <li>■ Community connections and engagement.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

### THE REACH OF THE CONNECTED BY 25 INITIATIVE

The number of young people touched by the Connected by 25 Initiative can be considered at two levels: the number of young people directly targeted with services in the Connected by 25 counties; and the number of young people reached by the influence of the Connected by 25 work on the policies and practices affecting young people in the targeted counties and beyond. The second number is no doubt much larger than the first, but it is difficult to quantify because of the diffuse influence of the work. Across the 11 sites, **4,861 young people** were directly targeted with services.

■ **California Connected by 25 Initiative.** In the eight counties, the California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I) has been conceived and implemented as a child welfare system change effort; there is no separate category of Connected by 25 services. The work of Connected by 25 is to expand and improve existing child welfare services in the core strategy areas. The target population is all youth in and aging out of foster care in the designated counties. The data tracking system implemented through CC25I in the California counties is tracking baseline and outcome data on all youth in and aging out of care in the CC25I counties. Across the eight counties, the number of youth targeted is 2,336 with specific county numbers as follows:

- Orange: 548
- San Francisco: 534
- Fresno: 504
- Santa Clara: 418
- Stanislaus: 142
- Solano: 119
- Humboldt: 54
- Glenn: 17

■ **Florida Connected by 25.** Since 2005, the Connected by 25 work in Hillsborough and Brevard Counties has served approximately 2,300 young people by hiring staff to work directly with transitioning young people ages 13 to 21 and through the Opportunity Passport™, Reach for the Stars, Educational Services, and Employment Skills Training Services.

■ **Indiana Connected by 25.** In Indiana, the Connected by 25 work is targeted to young people in Marion County. The initiative aims to influence child welfare practice in the county. In addition, Connected by 25 administers discrete services and has served 225 young people since beginning in 2009.



FCWG invested in the development of Connected by 25 sites in three states—California, Florida, and Indiana. Today, the national Connected by 25 Initiative includes sites in Fresno, Glenn, Humboldt, Orange, San Francisco, Santa Clara, Solano, and Stanislaus Counties in California; Hillsborough and Brevard Counties in Florida; and Marion County in Indiana. With the foundation of the five core strategies outlined in the logic model, community leaders have had significant discretion to shape their programs to take best advantage of local resources

and to respond to local needs. Although all the demonstration sites share a common focus and set of overarching results, site leaders have taken significantly different approaches to the work. An overview of the funders, partners, and core strategies in each site is presented in the table. More detailed descriptions of each site’s history, funding, organizational structure, and approach to the work is included in Appendix C. (See, also, Reach of the Connected by 25 Initiative on page 20.)







# REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

**Connected by 25 sites in each of the three states evolved uniquely, reflecting their different configurations of funders; the local policy and program environment; and the needs, strengths, and priorities of local stakeholders.** Considerable variety exists among the sites in term of their planning and implementation timeframe, their organizational structures, the key partners involved, and the emphasis placed on individual program strategies. Despite the variation, all of the sites are united in working to implement the comprehensive services envisioned in *Connected by 25* by engaging young people as key leaders and working collaboratively with multiple community players. Consequently, reflecting on successes and challenges across the sites offers insight into the innovative approaches they developed and strategies for overcoming barriers to implementation. This publication includes reflections and lessons learned in the following key areas:

- getting the work started;
- leading and managing the work;
- implementing supports and services;
- influencing systems, policies, and practices; and
- leveraging resources to sustain the work.

## Getting the Work Started

Despite the significant variation in contextual factors, the initial planning and development process was similar, though not identical, across the sites. The planning work in all sites was guided by assessment tools developed by the funders. The assessment tools asked site leaders to gather data on indicators of youth well-being and solicit input from stakeholders (see *Assessment Tools Used in Planning Connected by 25 Work* on page 24). Most sites undertook a comprehensive planning process that brought together stakeholders from different systems and organizations. However, the convening entity, the range of partners involved, and the particular timeframe sites took for planning varied widely.

Sites that struggled to move from planning to implementation suffered from a lack of clarity and agreement among leaders on the vision and priorities for the work and/or uncertainty about who would fund and/or lead the work. Indiana undertook a comprehensive planning process, but the desire to implement the project as a public-private partnership delayed implementation. Local players had to work out how private funders and the public child welfare agency could co-fund the work in the midst of major reform efforts in the public child welfare system. Likewise, two California counties began planning for the work but ultimately did not proceed with implementation because of competing priorities in the child welfare agency.

## ASSESSMENT TOOLS USED IN PLANNING CONNECTED BY 25 WORK

The Connected by 25 communities used two assessment tools developed by funders to guide their initial planning work: the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Environmental Scan and the California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I) Self-Assessment/County Planning Tool.

- **Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Environmental Scan.** Both Indiana and Florida used the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Environmental Scan to inform their initial planning work. The environmental scan tool asks community leaders to gather data on the demographics of young people in and aging out of foster care, the policies and programs in place to address young people's needs, and the outcome data available on young people's well-being.
- **CC25I Self-Assessment/County Planning Tool.** All the California sites used the CC25I Self-Assessment/County Planning tool, which includes overview information on demographics and placement information for young people. The tool also has sections with data and planning questions related to each of the CC25I strategy areas: K–12 education; housing; employment/job training/postsecondary education; Independent Living Skills Program; financial competency and asset development; personal and social asset development; and permanency. The self-assessment tool is available at <http://www.f2f.ca.gov/res/Pre-Implementation.pdf>.

The Florida sites and the early implementing counties in California (Fresno, San Francisco, Stanislaus, and Santa Clara) generally proceeded smoothly from planning to implementation. In Florida and California, the work ultimately moved from implementation in the initial sites to expansion to additional sites.

### Key Lessons Learned

The expansion experiences highlight several readiness factors that affect the ability of communities to take on work toward the comprehensive vision laid out in Connected by 25.

- **Across the sites, common indicators of community readiness to take on the work emerged.** These readiness factors included the buy-in of key child welfare agency leaders and alignment of their vision with the *Connected by 25* vision; a history of and/or willingness to develop partnerships between child welfare and multiple community agencies; and the capacity of the lead agency to focus on the work, given competing reform efforts and priorities in the local context.
- **Successful initial project development depended on understanding and building on existing and related reform efforts in the child welfare system.** In all the sites, an important part of the initial planning and development work was to understand and build on related reform efforts in the child welfare system.
  - In California, the Connected by 25 work was integrated into the existing Family to Family initiative, a privately-funded child welfare reform initiative being implemented in 25 counties. While the Family to Family work had a broader focus than youth transitions, it laid an important foundation in permanency and community partnerships.
  - The Eckerd Family Foundation initially approached Hillsborough Kids Inc., the lead agency in Hillsborough County for Florida's privatized community-based care model of child welfare services, about implementing the *Connected by 25* vision. The timing of Eckerd's approach coincided with a major restructuring of Independent Living services. As a result,

the funding for the Connected by 25 Initiative was subcontracted to Camelot Community Care, the same private provider agency contracted to take the lead on Independent Living services in the county.

- In Indiana, the initial planning period for Connected by 25 coincided with a major statewide child welfare reform effort that created a state child welfare agency independent of the social services agency; centralized authority from counties to the state; and infused major new resources for services. Leaders of the initiative did not move from planning to implementation, despite the commitment of private dollars to the effort, until the state reform structure was in place and they were able to leverage state dollars to support implementation.
- **The input of young people was critical to shaping the projects and helping solidify the buy-in and commitment of the partners to take on the work.** All the sites were successful in soliciting meaningful input from young people in the planning and development of the projects. In Indiana, a youth group was one of the multiple stakeholder groups that convened for planning during a six-month period, and young people participated in the executive planning group. In Florida, the initial business plan was developed primarily by convening multiple

groups of young people to provide input on how the work should be structured. Each of the California sites structured planning in its own way, and most included young people as part of the core planning group. Stakeholders say this input not only had a substantive effect on the direction and shape of the projects, but also was an important force in strengthening the commitment of key leaders involved in planning and creating momentum for implementation.

- **Gathering and using data on the status of young people in the community helped engage multiple partners from the community and inform priority-setting among them.** The assessment tools the sites used in planning required collecting data on how youth in and aging out of care were doing in, for example, education, employment, and earnings. In some cases, collecting this data was challenging; in other cases, assembling the information was nearly impossible. Yet site leaders found that where data was available, it was useful in documenting the need for individuals to come together with a focus on this population and helping individuals coming from multiple perspectives agree on priorities for the work.



*Strong community engagement and investment is paramount. The community needs to trust the child welfare agency, which is really somewhat predicated on an existing relationship. Community partners need to believe that the agency will move things forward and effect change.*

—Crystal Luffberry, integration director,  
California Co-Investment Partnership

## Leading and Managing the Work

Site leaders developed a unique management and governance structure based on the local players involved. In California, funders decided that the lead agency in each site should be the county child welfare agency. In Florida, FCWG members initially approached the county-level Community-Based Care agency about implementing the pilot. Ultimately, the Community-Based Care agency contracted with its Independent Living provider to act as the lead for the project. Indiana has a very different structure. United Way of Central Indiana became the lead entity for planning and administering the project, when no clear alternative direct service lead agency emerged to take on the task.

Site coordinators in each jurisdiction shared important characteristics, though their professional backgrounds and positions varied. First, across the sites, very little turnover occurred in site leadership. This helped ensure that sites could make steady progress in implementation and build and maintain key relationships. Second, the site leaders that were most successful in implementing comprehensive supports in partnership with multiple systems and community agencies took an entrepreneurial approach to the work. They were willing and able to think outside the box of the traditional child welfare bureaucracy to develop collaborative approaches and deploy their resources in innovative ways.

In addition to the lead agency, each site has a governance entity that generally includes a broad-based advisory board as well as a youth leadership board. The specific composition of the site advisory board varies across the sites but typically includes:

- child welfare agency leadership, managers, and line staff;
- young people involved with the child welfare system;
- private child welfare services providers;

- judicial representatives;
- leadership and staff from related systems, including housing, K–12 education, higher education, workforce development, and health and mental health; and
- private stakeholders, including local funders, business representatives, and community agencies.

Sites also vary in the frequency with which they bring these groups together, with most doing so at least quarterly. They also vary on the degree to which boards have formal decision-making and governance power in contrast to more of a networking and advisory role. One especially effective governance model that emerged involved a multilayered



advisory group that includes an executive committee responsible for decisionmaking as well as subcommittees or workgroups that focus on work in different strategy areas (see Santa Clara County's Governance Structure on page 28 for one example of an effective governance structure).

### **Key Lessons Learned**

Following are lessons learned on leading and managing the work.

- **No right answer exists on the question of who should serve as the lead agency for this work:** the public child welfare agency or a community-based partner. The more critical factor contributing to the success of the initiative's structure seems to be the **strength of linkages between the child welfare agency and multiple community partners** and the degree to which these linkages are institutionalized. Strong public-private partnerships are at the heart of an effective structure. The groundwork for collaboration is laid through initial planning, and it is institutionalized through governance arrangements, relationships among key champions, and the development of successful collaborative service provision efforts in strategy areas.

A key factor in whether sites were successful in establishing strong linkages between the child welfare agency and other key stakeholders is the quality and position of initiative leadership. If an initiative is situated within the child welfare agency, the individuals charged with leading and coordinating the work must have the formal authority and/or access to decisionmakers that enables them to influence decisions on practice approach and resource allocation within the child welfare agency. Initiative leaders both inside and outside the child welfare agency must have the credibility, position, and leadership skills needed to engage and influence key champions from multiple public systems and private agencies. They must also have skills in facilitation

*One important lesson learned is that information collected through needs assessments can either be used as a weapon or a tool. No one in Hillsborough County did the "gotcha." There was always a focus on how to support improvement.*

—Diane Zambito, executive director,  
Connected by 25 Initiative, Florida

and relationship-building needed to keep the momentum going for collaborative efforts as initiatives mature.

- **The significant ongoing involvement of FCWG members in the governance and direction of the initiatives has been an important contributor to the success of these initiatives.** Coordinators from all three states cite the unusual level of ongoing involvement by the funders in the governance and direction of the work as a key asset. Not only have funders remained very engaged with the leaders of the work at the site level, they have included site coordinators as well as young people in the ongoing conference calls and meetings of the FCWG. Funders who engage as partners, rather than limit themselves to a narrower grant-making role, bring important benefits to the sites. For example, stakeholders in California noted that funders' participation in the steering committee of the California Connected by 25 Initiative meant that the evolution of the work informed the grant-making of the funders. California funders also have funded complementary initiatives in the CC25I communities that have helped further partnerships and expand the initiative's accomplishments.
- **An important contribution of the structure of Connected by 25 has been to bring the perspectives of multiple stakeholders together to shape the direction of initia-**

### SANTA CLARA COUNTY'S GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Santa Clara County's governance structure has served as a model for other counties implementing Connected by 25 in California. The county's advisory group is an extension of an existing workgroup that supported the implementation of Family to Family and other county child welfare initiatives, focusing on integrating those initiatives into daily child welfare practice. The advisory group includes engaged stakeholders from multiple disciplines, including child welfare agency leadership, the director of juvenile probation, judges, attorneys, chief executive officers of private agencies, youth, and direct service staff.

From that advisory group, the county developed workgroups for each strategy area. The workgroups are co-chaired by a staff member from the child welfare agency and a community person. Workgroup co-chairs were selected based on their ability to serve as champions in the community by accessing critical stakeholders and resources to move the work forward. Youth have an active voice at workgroup meetings.

The workgroups developed workplans for implementation based on the goals and objectives of Santa Clara County in each of the strategy areas. Once a quarter, the workgroup chairs come together with key child welfare leadership and community stakeholders to review progress, challenges, and barriers in implementation experienced by each workgroup.

Santa Clara County's governance structure created momentum for the California Connected by 25 Initiative in the broader community. The workgroup model also enabled Santa Clara County to accomplish a lot in a short period and sent a message to the community that the child welfare system cannot meet all the needs of transitioning youth alone. This community-driven approach also helped contribute to efforts to fund program and service expansions and provide a foundation for sustaining these efforts over time.

**tives for youth.** Prior to the presence of Connected by 25 in many of the demonstration communities, there was no vehicle for top leaders of child welfare and other systems, line staff, young people involved in the system, private providers, and advocates to get together and think about what they want the child welfare system to achieve for transition-age youth and how the

system can accomplish these goals. By providing this vehicle, Connected by 25 has increased the focus and priority placed on youth services by child welfare leadership. The initiative has helped those within and outside the child welfare system move beyond purely adversarial stances to engage in productive system reform conversations.



## Implementing Supports and Services

While embracing the comprehensive vision put forth by *Connected by 25*, each Connected by 25 site implemented a unique package of supports and services in response to the strengths and needs of its community. The Connected by 25 strategies include:

- advocating and supporting educational attainment;
- facilitating and creating access to workforce development opportunities;
- providing financial literacy education;
- encouraging savings and asset development; and
- creating entrepreneurship opportunities.

In addition, as the work evolved in the sites, two more strategies emerged as priorities in multiple sites: **supporting permanent connections with caring adults** and **developing safe and affordable housing options for young people**. An important lesson learned was the value of these two strategy areas, which did not play a prominent role in the initial *Connected by 25* logic model.

### **Advocating and Supporting Educational Attainment**

All 11 communities implementing the Connected by 25 Initiative directed significant time and other resources to supporting educational attainment among transitioning youth. The Connected by 25 work focused more attention and resources on education outcomes, which led to the development of partnerships among child welfare agencies and school districts, county education agencies, existing education support programs, and institutions of higher education. These partnerships helped implement systems and processes to address key barriers to education success, including the lack of data sharing across child welfare and education systems and challenges with timely enrollment as a result of placement changes. They also increased the targeted education supports young people

in and transitioning from foster care receive (see Education Supports in the Connected by 25 Sites on page 30).

### **Lessons Learned**

Following are lessons learned on advocating and supporting educational attainment.

- **Formalize coordination efforts between the child welfare agency and targeted school districts.** One frequent barrier faced by child welfare agencies seeking to improve education outcomes is local control of the education system. The jurisdiction of a single county or regional child welfare entity may contain multiple school districts, each with distinct administrative procedures and requirements. It can be difficult for child welfare agency leaders to identify a point of entry or vehicle for coordinating with the education system. Focusing efforts on creating partnerships with individual school districts with the largest proportion of youth in care appears to be the most effective way to make progress. These partnerships will likely be more productive if they are formalized through memoranda of understanding that address administrative issues such as data sharing and school enrollment procedures.

*The most significant accomplishment was developing partnerships with all of the systems, especially child welfare and education, to exchange education data and records. Youth move so much, so it is important that information is freely exchanged. Data sharing also helps meet child welfare agency requirements and promotes communication about education.*

—James Anderson, project manager,  
California Connected by 25 Initiative

## EDUCATION SUPPORTS IN THE CONNECTED BY 25 SITES

Education supports include diverse activities that can be grouped into two main categories: K–12 Education Success Supports and Postsecondary Education Success Supports.

**K–12 Education Success Supports** include administrative activities, partnerships, programs, and services aimed at helping young people in foster care maintain education stability, progress in their education, and earn a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Sites sought to improve K–12 education outcomes through the following activities.

- **Coordinating efforts to address administrative barriers to success.** Child welfare agencies worked with school districts and county education agencies to develop systems and processes to share education outcome and placement data and support school stability. Among the four early implementing counties in California, all created forms and procedures for seamless school discharge and re-enrollment procedures when there is a change in placement that necessitates a school change. All four also began sharing data on key education outcomes. For example, Santa Clara County created a web-based data system with key health and education data that can be accessed by the county child welfare agency, participating school districts, and the probation agency.<sup>2</sup>
- **Dedicating staff to focus on education outcomes.** Sites established staff in the education and child welfare systems who were dedicated to addressing the education needs of youth in foster care. In Hillsborough County, the site used

support from Lumina Foundation for Education to hire a school district-employed guidance counselor who was collocated with Connected by 25 staff. In Indiana, Lumina has funded education advocates through the Education Success Program. In California, all four early implementing counties established educational liaisons employed by the child welfare agencies, with three of these established as full-time positions. Fresno, California, expanded its Independent Living Program (ILP) to include ILP social workers located in three of the largest school districts in the Fresno area.

- **Incorporating greater attention to education outcomes into the ongoing practices of child welfare agencies and providers.** Florida, Indiana, and multiple California sites have developed training for child welfare caseworkers, as well as caretakers, to help them understand education mandates, barriers, and opportunities available to youth in foster care and better address education outcomes in ongoing case planning.
- **Developing new or creating linkages to existing academic support programs and services.** Multiple sites developed partnerships to bring targeted academic supports to youth in foster care. In Hillsborough County, Connected by 25 created a GED program specifically for youth in foster care in partnership with the Hillsborough County School District’s adult education unit. In California, a strong partnership between a local afterschool tutoring provider and the Stanislaus County Office of Education resulted in increased access to tutoring and academic remediation services for youth in foster care.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see Heidi Sommer, Lynn Wu, and Jane Mauldon, *California Connected by 25: Efforts to Address the K–12 Educational Needs of Transitioning Foster Youth* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California–Berkeley, CC25I Systems Change Assessment Team, 2009), <http://www.f2f.ca.gov/CA25Reports.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



### **Postsecondary Education Success Supports**

include programs and services that provide transitioning youth with information on postsecondary education options and the resources available to help youth pursue those options. Other postsecondary success supports are resources and services to help young people successfully attend and complete postsecondary education. Following are examples of activities sites undertook to improve access to and success in postsecondary education.

- **Coordinating with existing education programs focused on helping high-risk youth access postsecondary education.** Many of the California sites are working to increase postsecondary success supports by coordinating with Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). With the support of a planning grant from the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, Fresno, Santa Clara, Stanislaus, Orange, and Humboldt Counties in California are participating in the Foster Youth AVID Pilot. AVID seeks to ensure that all students succeed in the most rigorous curriculum, enter mainstream school activities, increase enrollment in four-year colleges, and become educated participants and leaders in democratic society. AVID has had a strong presence in California for quite some time, but youth in foster care were routinely discouraged from participating in the program because their frequent moves prevented them from engaging in a learning community. Through targeted relationship-building, each pilot site developed a Core County Team composed of AVID regional directors, county office of education foster youth services coordinators and educational liaisons, and Connected by 25 site leads. As a result, the number of youth participating in AVID has increased significantly,

and the number of counties participating in the partnership continues to grow.

- **Providing training to young people and caretakers on postsecondary education options and requirements.** Multiple Connected by 25 sites, in Indiana and in Fresno, Stanislaus, Santa Clara, and San Francisco Counties in California, offer trainings to young people and caretakers on requirements for high school completion, postsecondary education options, and available supports and prerequisites for postsecondary education.
- **Linking young people pursuing postsecondary education with education advocates.** The most common approach sites implemented to promote postsecondary education success was to link young people with adults who could offer ongoing education counseling and guidance to them. In Indiana, Lumina Foundation for Education supported the development of the Educational Success Program (ESP), through which education advocates employed by the Connected by 25 Initiative are collocated on the Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis and Ivy Tech campuses. In California, multiple sites have focused on creating linkages with existing comprehensive campus support programs, such as Guardian Scholars, that provide education advocacy and supports on multiple campuses across California. Orange County linked its permanency and education support strategies by using found relatives as tutors and education advocates for foster youth.

- **Consider collocation of child welfare and education staff.** Collocation has been an effective strategy to increase accessibility to young people in the schools and to advocate for education services from within the system. Collocation facilitates the development of close working relationships that help break down some of the cultural barriers and mistrust that exist between child welfare and education systems. In Hillsborough County, Florida, collocating the school district guidance counselor dedicated to serving foster youth in the Connected by 25 site facilitated a close working relationship between the guidance counselor and Independent Living transition specialists who offer ongoing support to young people transitioning out of foster care.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, California's Fresno County has successfully collocated Independent Living Program social workers in the public schools. This affords youth better access to their social worker and enables the social worker to better track and support young people's education progress.
- **Coordinate with existing education supports.** In many communities, education supports exist but youth transitioning from foster care often cannot access them. Coordinating with existing programs enables youth to enroll in these programs. The key to coordinating with existing programs is often relationship-building, which requires dedicating time and other resources. California Connected by 25 sites have demonstrated success in coordinating with existing supports no doubt, in part, because the funders supporting CC25I have dedicated resources to establishing coordination with specific education support programs.
- **Establish and focus on measures of shared accountability.** Data collection and analysis

demonstrating positive outcomes have helped build and sustain momentum for collaborative education activities in all the Connected by 25 sites. In sites where multiple systems were accountable for shared outcomes, partnerships were stronger. In both California and Florida, state legislation facilitated the development of productive partnerships between K–12 education and child welfare. The legislation instituted mandates for ensuring education stability and ongoing educational planning for young people in foster care. Site leaders could then use these mandates as a focal point when engaging the education system. Ongoing data collection and documentation of education progress then help maintain the momentum and support for the partnership. Good data on education outcomes also helps program leaders focus their education supports on the young people who most need them.

### **Facilitating Access to Workforce Development and Entrepreneurship Opportunities**

Sites varied in the degree to which they have focused on facilitating access to workforce development opportunities, and sites have not successfully implemented entrepreneurship opportunities. San Francisco, California, and Indiana have placed the greatest emphasis on workforce development and also achieved the greatest successes (see Workforce Development Supports in the Connected by 25 Sites on page 33). Across the other sites, the Connected by 25 Initiative helped focus the child welfare agency on the need to coordinate with the workforce development system, and this has led to some initial enhancements in workforce development opportunities for young people, particularly in

<sup>4</sup> For more information, see Margaret Flynn-Khan, Amanda Szekely, and Cheryl Hayes, *Supporting Postsecondary Education Success for Youth Transitioning from Foster Care: Lessons Learned from the Breaking the Cycle Projects* (Washington, D.C.: The Finance Project, 2009).

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTS IN THE CONNECTED BY 25 SITES

- Indiana Connected by 25 has formed a successful relationship with the county's workforce investment board, the Indiana Private Industry Council (IPIC). IPIC provided a one-time \$20,000 grant for seed funds for individual development accounts for participants. In addition, Connected by 25 Indiana has successfully entered into a contract with IPIC to create a program to serve transitioning youth within the Youth Employment Services program; 40 slots will be reserved for this population. The program will include employment preparation and job placement and retention services. Connected by 25 will work with four employment sites across Marion County, where there is a high concentration of youth in foster care, and will provide technical assistance and training to staff working with youth in foster care.
- San Francisco County has formed a successful partnership with the local office of economic and workforce development, which has developed an infrastructure to serve youth in foster care. For example, county contracts require contractors to employ people from a list of eligible WorkFirst participants, and youth in foster care are named as a specific population. Further, the child welfare agency and office of economic and workforce development have come to an agreement that the Independent Living Plan can serve as a referral for employment services. During the most recent year, the office of economic and workforce development served 59 youth, 36 of whom obtained jobs.
- In Fresno, a partnership with the local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) has greatly improved summer employment opportunities for young people in care. A partnership between the child welfare agency and the WIB has helped ensure that young people have the documentation necessary to participate in summer employment opportunities through the WIB.

assessment and training. Seven of eight Connected by 25 site coordinators responding to an online survey say Connected by 25 has led to expansion or enhancement of job-readiness assessment and career-specific training for youth in foster care in their county.<sup>5</sup>

Despite some promising accomplishments, site leaders found the development of productive partnerships with the workforce development system difficult because of varying organizational cultures and priorities between the workforce development and child welfare systems. Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) have specific outcome benchmarks for employment placement and retention on which they must report to maintain federal funding. Because

of multiple placements and formidable barriers to employment, youth in foster care are deemed hard to serve. WIBs have few incentives to reach out to this population. Although site leaders have laid the groundwork for productive collaboration, many have not yet seen concrete progress in terms of the provision of targeted supports that lead to enhanced employment placements for young people.

None of the Connected by 25 sites successfully pursued entrepreneurship opportunities for transitioning youth, primarily because most site leaders have not identified entrepreneurship as a priority and so have not included this strategy in implementation plans. Only Orange County, California, and Hillsborough County, Florida, considered offer-

<sup>5</sup> Counties that did not respond include Santa Clara in California and Hillsborough and Brevard in Florida.

ing entrepreneurship opportunities. Early in the implementation phase, Hillsborough County site leaders implemented the Biz Kids entrepreneurship program for youth in care. Unfortunately, they did not yet have the needed supports to ensure young people could get to and effectively participate in the intense program. Orange County engaged a local nonprofit organization to help with entrepreneurship issues, but the local partner had to dissolve the relationship because of financial constraints.

### **Lessons Learned**

Following are lessons learned on facilitating access to workforce development and entrepreneurship opportunities.

- **Engage early and maintain ongoing collaborative planning.** The Indiana and San Francisco County successes were due to significant time spent on collaborative planning between workforce development and child welfare leaders. Site leaders engaged a representative from the Indiana Private Industry Council from the earliest stages of planning the Connected by 25 Initiative and, therefore, IPIC was prepared to be a partner as the initiative was launched. Site leaders in San Francisco County, after working closely with key partners to establish working referral relationships and targeted services, established a citywide planning group to take these efforts to the next level. The group has included the Mayor's Transitional Youth Task Force, the department of children, youth & their families, the local office of economic and workforce development, child welfare and the Independent Living Program, Workforce Development, and the Mayor's Office of Community Investment. It is working to

develop a citywide strategy that will coordinate efforts across several departments to address the workforce development needs of youth in foster care.

- **Persist in identifying appropriate vehicles for collaboration.** In San Francisco, the relationship between the child welfare agency and workforce development agency initially was strained. Yet both agencies were willing to expend the effort to understand each other's organizational cultures and persist in working through barriers. As a result, youth in foster care are now a specific focus of workforce efforts in the county. In addition, San Francisco did not limit its partnership efforts to the workforce investment board. It also created partnerships directly with community service organizations that provide employment services to youth. These efforts have succeeded in moving more high-need young people into employment services and jobs.

### **Providing Financial Literacy Education and Encouraging Savings and Asset Development**

Nine of the 11 Connected by 25 sites offer financial literacy training linked to asset development programs.<sup>6</sup> Connected by 25 has contributed to the development of significant new capacity in this area. Among the nine sites offering financial literacy training and individual development account (IDA) accounts, seven did not offer young people IDAs prior to the Connected by 25 work. As of 2009, 381 young people had opened IDAs across the sites.<sup>7</sup> Site leaders generally found it took significant time to design and implement the IDAs. Through partnerships with banking institutions and other private

<sup>6</sup> Humboldt and Glenn Counties in California do not include individual development accounts as part of their Connected by 25 Initiative.

<sup>7</sup> The total number of individual development accounts reflects IDAs in Indiana, in Hillsborough and Brevard Counties in Florida, and in Fresno, San Francisco, Santa Clara, and Stanislaus Counties in California. Two California counties (Solano and Orange) have included IDAs as part of their focus strategies but are early in implementation and have not yet enrolled young people in IDAs.

industry partners, however, site leaders overcame initial barriers and are making IDA accounts available to targeted youth. Most sites provided basic financial literacy or budgeting information prior to the Connected by 25 demonstration as a component of Independent Living skills curricula. Connected by 25 has prompted site leaders to greatly enhance and expand their financial literacy training modules. Grant support for IDA matching funds included in demonstration funding and the technical assistance from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative were both instrumental in enabling sites to develop these strategies.

### **Lessons Learned**

Following are lessons learned on providing financial literacy education and encouraging savings and asset development.

- **Seek partnerships with the financial industry.** Development and implementation of an IDA program require technical expertise and administrative systems not typically available in child welfare agencies. Such a program's long-term sustainability hinges on the ability to develop matching funds for IDAs to draw from on an ongoing basis. Establishing strong partnerships with banking and other private-sector partners is critical to the effective design and implementation as well as the sustainability of financial literacy and asset development strategies. Some of the demonstration sites successfully partnered with banks or financial planning associations to deliver financial literacy education. For example, in Santa Clara County, the Financial Planners Association (FPA) volunteered to provide financial literacy training in partnership with youth formerly in foster care. During each training, FPA volunteers provide contact information for youth and remain available for consultation and support outside training sessions. Some youth have maintained contact with young adult co-facilitators or with the FPA volunteers after the training and formed mentoring relationships.
- **Engage youth in training.** Engaging youth who were formerly in foster care as financial literacy trainers has helped ensure that the financial issues most salient to young people are addressed in financial literacy training and has increased the number of youth who participate in such training. For example, alumni of foster care serve as financial literacy trainers in Hillsborough County, Florida. Through the Policy to Practice Academy, youth are trained in public speaking and leadership skills, which prepare them to be active decisionmakers in various settings. Once they have fulfilled the academy's requirements, youth ages 18 to 21 can become trainers and receive stipends for their work. Alumni in Santa Clara County, California, also are hired to co-facilitate financial literacy trainings and receive a stipend for their services through a local community college.
- **Consider how financial literacy training and IDA support can be institutionalized into existing supports for youth aging out of foster care.** As with other strategy areas, the institutionalization of financial literacy training and case management supports for IDAs into existing child welfare and independent living services helps avoid duplication of effort and contributes to the long-term viability and potential reach of these strategies. Many sites have integrated financial literacy training into existing Independent Living skills training modules provided to young people. In addition, site leaders are seeking to ensure that the child welfare staff, providers, and caretakers already involved in supporting young people in their transition to adulthood also are engaged in helping them save and reach financial goals.
- **Implementing and sustaining IDAs is labor-intensive and requires public-private collaboration.** Although individual development accounts have been beneficial to youth,

site leaders note that IDAs are labor-intensive and challenging to sustain in the long term. Early-implementing California counties found it took significant start-up time to implement IDAs—typically more than a year to establish the administrative infrastructure, identify local resources, and form the local partnerships necessary to operate an IDA program.<sup>8</sup> While many sites have dedicated child welfare Independent Living funding to support the IDA match for the short term, county child welfare leaders express concern about the long-term viability of this financing strategy, given other pressures on that funding. Successfully sustaining IDA funds will likely depend on the level of commitment of private partners to work collaboratively with child welfare agencies to secure IDA match funds.

*Child welfare systems do not have the flexibility to invest in something where they are not sure they will see the return on investment. That's where private dollars are so important. Child welfare does not have the flexibility to innovate. The dollars they receive have strings and requirements attached.*

—Diane Zambito, executive director,  
Connected by 25 Initiative, Florida

### Supporting Permanent Connections

Generally, permanency refers to the stable and lifelong connections and relationships people need in their lives. Legal permanence includes situations that afford legal status, such as adoption, relative guardianship, reunification, and family preservation. Relational permanence typically is achieved through more informal connections with relatives, a network of peers, or adults who are willing to make a long-term commitment to a young person's well-being.<sup>9</sup>

The manner in which Connected by 25 sites approached permanency varies depending on the site structure (see Supporting Permanent Connections in the Connected by 25 Sites on page 37). In California, where the county child welfare agency is the lead entity, site leaders placed a strong emphasis on strengthening permanency planning for young people as a part of case management and transition planning practice. In Florida, the Connected by 25 sites encourage increased attention to permanency planning in transition planning practice through training and technical assistance provided by Connected by 25 staff and young people. In Indiana, the child welfare agency has a major permanency effort under way. Given that Connected by 25 is administered by a community agency, leaders decided the best use of their resources is to focus on connecting young people to supportive adult relationships through mentoring approaches.

### Lessons Learned

Following are lessons learned on supporting permanent connections.

- **Focus on practice change.** Caseworkers are often the primary driver of permanency. Changing casework practice is central to improving permanency outcomes. Because the child welfare agency serves as the Connected by 25 lead in California counties, those demonstration sites were well positioned to explicitly focus on permanency as an initiative strategy. With the ability to directly influence casework practice through supervision, California Connected by 25 counties were able to focus directly on ensuring lifelong connections for youth transitioning from foster care.
- **Align initiatives.** No single initiative can comprehensively address all the needs of youth aging out of the foster care system, so aligning complementary initiatives is critical. Seven of the Connected by 25 sites in California are California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) sites. To

## SUPPORTING PERMANENT CONNECTIONS IN THE CONNECTED BY 25 SITES

The Connected by 25 sites approached permanency differently according to site structure.

- In California, CC25I leaders have placed significant emphasis on permanency by carefully aligning the initiative with the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP). CPYP was started in January 2003 as a result of a multi-year grant awarded by the Stuart Foundation. Through training and technical assistance, CPYP seeks to ensure that no youth leaves the California child welfare system without a permanent lifelong connection to a caring adult. Technical assistance focuses on administrative practices, permanency practice, identification of the project target group, staff development, partnerships, involvement of youth in finding their own permanent connection, and integration with other initiatives. Many of the California sites were already receiving technical assistance from CPYP when the Connected by 25 demonstration began, and the focus of Connected by 25 on permanency has contributed additional resources to their work. Site coordinators note that the coordinated work of Connected by 25 and CPYP has increased the emphasis on ensuring young people leave care with a lifelong connection, increased family finding for young people preparing to leave care, increased the inclusion of biological parents as a part of the permanency plan, and led to earlier and more frequent emancipation planning so permanency can be addressed while there is still time to support relationship-building.
- Florida Connected by 25 is encouraging improved permanency practice in case planning through training and technical assistance. Site leaders have created the Policy to Practice Academy, a partnership between Connected by 25 Initiative staff and certified Connected by 25 youth trainers who have worked together to develop training programs and workshops for practitioners as well as young people in care. The academy offers youth outcome-based training for child welfare providers that includes a module on permanency planning for teens in foster care. Youth trainers are providing training to child welfare practitioners across the state.
- Although it is not positioned to address permanency planning directly, Indiana Connected by 25 has placed a high priority on connecting young people to supportive relationships. Leaders identified “an advocate, a mentor, or a coach for each youth” as one of their four cornerstones of effective supports for youth transitioning from foster care. Indiana is early in its implementation efforts. A program coordinator has been hired to focus on mentoring, but implementation of this strategy has not yet begun.

ensure counties could maximize the benefits from both initiatives, CPYP and Connected by 25 aligned their proposals and workplans; for example, sites have a single set of reporting requirements. All California sites responding to the survey say Connected by 25 has unconditionally supported CPYP’s work in permanency. CPYP is sunseting this year, so Connected by 25 is working to ensure that CPYP’s efforts are sustained

by embedding CPYP strategies and activities into the CC25I model moving forward.

### ***Developing Safe and Affordable Housing Options***

Although housing originally was not a primary strategy of the national Connected by 25 Initiative, many site leaders made housing a priority in their implementation efforts. California Connected by 25 sites



collaborated with local housing initiatives to develop housing resources, increased the use of available state funding to expand transitional housing capacity, and developed host family models of transitional housing to support lifelong connections for transitioning youth. Marion County Connected by 25 site leaders have taken advantage of an unexpected opportunity to act as a partner in developing supportive housing for youth leaving foster care.

### Lessons Learned

Following are lessons learned on developing safe and affordable housing options.

- **Form partnerships with diverse stakeholders.** To build effective housing supports, it is necessary to look beyond the child welfare system. The wider housing community, including public housing authorities, private housing developers, and transitional living providers, have access to resources and expertise that can benefit transitioning youth. Shortly after beginning implementation, a private housing developer approached Marion County Connected by 25 and offered to partner in creating supportive housing units for transitioning youth. Marion County leaders were able to reallocate their resources to take advantage of the opportunity, and they are partnering in the design and development of 30 units of supportive housing for youth. This has also positioned the initiative to take advantage of increased housing funding included in federal economic stimulus legislation.
- **Maximize funding by increasing knowledge of and access to housing streams.** The California Connected by 25 Initiative has provided technical assistance on securing funds for housing, including a workshop on how to maximize

a state funding opportunity titled Transitional Housing Plus (THP+) and presentations on supportive housing models. As a result, demonstration counties have increased their drawdown of state THP+ funds.<sup>10</sup> Counties also have benefited from other private funding streams, including the Foster Youth Housing Initiative, which pays for housing and support services as well as technical assistance and capacity-building. Although California's efforts have focused primarily on a state-specific funding opportunity, several federal funding streams can be used to support safe and affordable housing. Those interested in improving housing for transitioning youth should become familiar with these federal funding streams. These streams are often complex to understand and access, so partnering with those in the housing community is key to positioning initiatives for housing funds.

- **Consider host family transitional housing to facilitate lifelong connections.** Many California Connected by 25 sites implemented host family transitional housing. Using THP+ dollars, youth reside in a safe and stable household of a supportive family member, permanent connection, or other caring adult. Participation in a host family program can engage former foster youth and their permanent connection in a formal relationship that reinforces their long-term commitment to each other. Such housing also is most similar to what other youth experience during the transition to adulthood—young people gain hands-on experience in the daily activities that comprise independent living while still in a home with mentoring and supervision from supportive adults. Moreover, this model also is cost-effective because it uses existing housing units.

<sup>10</sup> For more information, see Heidi Sommer, Lynn Wu, and Jane Mauldon, *California Connected by 25: Efforts to Address the Housing Needs of Transitioning Foster Youth* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California–Berkeley, CC25I Systems Change Assessment Team, 2009).



## Influencing Systems, Policies, and Practices

An important focus of the Connected by 25 work in all the sites is to contribute to the development of more supportive public policies. Another is to change the way that public systems approach work with youth transitioning from foster care, including the degree to which multiple systems work together. Across the sites, leaders achieved significant accomplishments in improving the coordination of multiple systems to support better outcomes, contributing to the adoption of more supportive state and local policies and making child welfare practices more youth-centered and collaborative. (See *Influencing Child Welfare Practice Through Youth and Alumni Engagement* on page 40.)

### Lessons Learned

Following are lessons learned on influencing systems, policies, and practices.

- **The leadership and investments of private funders can play a critical role in fostering local influence on policies, practices, and systems.** Across the sites, coordinators note that their efforts to influence systems, policies, and practices have been facilitated by the ongoing leadership and investments of FCWG members and other private funders. Private funders helped create a climate in which site coordinators could
- exert influence on systems, policies, and practices in different ways. For example, in Florida, the Eckerd Family Foundation funded statewide public will-building and communications work that has created an awareness of the issue of transitioning youth. Across the sites and nationally, individual program officers from FCWG foundations have exerted leadership by reaching out to policymakers and serving as experts on relevant commissions and other entities set up to address the issues of youth transitioning from foster care.
- **Changes in federal and state policy do not necessarily translate into changes in practice, but policy changes can provide mandates, resources, and/or accountability mechanisms that help local leaders change practice.** Site leaders and FCWG members were involved in efforts to influence state policies while working at the county level to operationalize existing and new policies in ways that support young people. Likewise, their work to change practice at the county level helped highlight where further state policy change was needed and spurred new advocacy efforts.
- The flexibility of private dollars is important to support the innovation needed to change public agency practice. Several constraints make it diffi-

*We continually hear about Connected by 25 as a best practice model. It's really been embedded in the way people think about working with youth aging out of care. The initiative keeps energy moving and keeps focus on the population.*

—James Anderson, program manager,  
California Connected by 25 Initiative



## INFLUENCING CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE THROUGH YOUTH AND ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

Site coordinators highlight the important influence that the emphasis on youth and alumni engagement in Connected by 25 has had on child welfare practices. Having young people at the table to discuss desired outcomes of the initiative and priority strategies for achieving those outcomes has translated into a qualitative difference in the approaches pursued. In particular, site leaders from California and Florida note that Connected by 25 has led to changes in case management practices and transition planning that truly involves young people as partners. Sites are pursuing creative approaches to further institutionalize and expand their influence on the day-to-day practices of those working with young people in the child welfare system.

- In Florida, site leaders have created the Policy to Practice Academy, a partnership between Connected by 25 Initiative staff and certified Connected by 25 youth trainers who have worked together to develop training programs and workshops for practitioners as well as young people in care. The offerings include a five-module youth

outcome-based training to help child welfare providers understand Florida Independent Living requirements and implement practice in a manner that meets those requirements while supporting young people in achieving key outcomes. Certified youth trainers are delivering this training to child welfare and independent living services staff throughout the state. In addition, through a contract with the Florida Department of Children and Families, Florida Connected by 25 has provided technical assistance on the development of Independent Living transitional standards of care for community-based care agencies throughout the state.

- In California, five of the eight Connected by 25 counties are participating in a Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) aimed at transformation of Independent Living Programs (ILPs) in California. The BSC methodology is a quality improvement method that is designed to enable participating teams to make improvements in a focused topic of practice through a combination of group

cult for public agency leaders to change practice, even in the face of public policy that requires changes. These constraints include insufficient resources to fulfill policy mandates; a lack of flexible dollars to invest in the training, development of new systems and processes, and partnerships frequently required to transform practice; and rigid staffing structures in the context of bureaucracy, state staffing and funding restrictions, and union requirements.

The private dollars invested in the pilot communities offered relatively flexible funding targeted to system and practice improvement. Although these investments were small in the

context of overall spending on supports and services for youth in and aging out of care, they provided critical support for services and functions that are difficult to fund with existing child welfare streams, such as the facilitation of collaborative planning processes; the development of new data systems and the collection of more robust data on young people aging out of care; new staff positions; new collaborative service models developed in partnership with K–12 education, higher education, and workforce development; and funding for supports child welfare agencies have not typically viewed as within their domain (e.g., individual development accounts

learning sessions and implementation periods during which participants study, test, implement, and share small tests of change in practice. The Breakthrough Series Collaborative was developed as a result of California's participation in a National Governors Association Policy Academy on Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care that was sponsored by FCWG members. The state-level Connected by 25 management team helped design the Breakthrough Series Collaborative, and two FCWG members—the Walter S. Johnson Foundation and Casey Family Programs—are funding the collaborative along with the California Department of Social Services.

The framework for change on which the eight counties are focused is aligned with the CC25I vision. It includes a focus on permanency, education, employment, youth-centered practice and youth-adult partnerships, cross-system partnership and integration, and data collection. The counties participating in the Breakthrough Series Collaborative are using the opportunity to further institutionalize components of the Connected by 25 work in ILP services in their

county. A state-level BSC team also is addressing system coordination issues relevant to ILP practice improvement. The strong emphasis on peer learning in the Breakthrough Series Collaborative model means Connected by 25 counties have the opportunity to share their lessons learned from the demonstration work with other participating counties and the state team. The ultimate vision of the Breakthrough Series Collaborative is that lessons learned from the participating counties will be disseminated and influence ILP practice throughout the state.

- Indiana is early in its implementation phase, but leaders are laying the groundwork for influencing practice. Connected by 25 staff are providing training to all 20 case management units of the Marion County Department of Child Services. The training focuses on the Connected by 25 project and strategies to address the needs of foster youth aging out of the system. Nearly 200 case managers in the department will be trained.

**The FCWG collaborative investment in Hillsborough County [Florida] has demonstrated the value of collaboration and co-investment that we now preach to others. We now have the advantage of an actual model that is working in this community and that is being shared on a state-wide and national basis.**

—Jane Soltis, FCWG member, and vice president programs, Eckerd Family Foundation

for youth). The core challenge for sustainability becomes the degree to which these functions and processes can be institutionalized within state agencies.

- **Communicating the successes of promising models in pilot communities can influence policy and practice through replication.** The Connected by 25 pilot communities have influenced practice by virtue of their example. In both California and Florida, the work has expanded from the early implementing sites to additional counties. Having the experience and expertise of those who have piloted approaches helped engage the interest of stakeholders in

## INFLUENCING POLICY, PRACTICE, AND SYSTEM COORDINATION

The Connected by 25 demonstration work has made significant contributions to **increased coordination** among and between public systems and private agencies to better serve young people transitioning from foster care. Following are examples of promising coordination efforts.

- In California’s Orange County, the social services agency, probation agency, and behavioral health agency are connected to and able to enter and share data in the Foster Focus data system. Having shared outcome data helps inform monthly client-specific as well as system-needs discussions among social services, probation, behavioral health and the three workforce investment boards in the county. These entities have collaborated to draw down Mental Health Services Act funding for annual Bridge to Independence conferences.
- Fresno County in California has focused on linking Independent Living Program (ILP) staff to work in multiple partnering agencies in the community through collocation. ILP education work-

ers are placed directly on high school campuses in three school districts working closely with education staff. An ILP probation liaison placed at the Juvenile Justice Center identifies young people who are eligible for ILP services and makes appropriate referrals. ILP staff frequently attend workforce investment board meetings aimed at providing employment services to foster youth. ILP works in collaboration with school districts, the probation liaison, and the workforce investment board to hold an annual “access to higher education” workshop that provides young people receiving Independent Living services with information on postsecondary education options and requirements.

- In California’s Stanislaus County, a close partnership between the county child welfare and behavioral health and recovery services agency has enabled the county to assign a mental health clinician to every youth preparing to transition from foster care. The clinicians are collocated within the child welfare agency.

expansion communities as well as hasten progress in implementation. The statewide support office in California has increasingly placed an emphasis on offering peer technical assistance opportunities through which leaders in sites that have made progress in key strategy areas can share their experience with other site leaders.

In Florida, the initial administrating office for the Hillsborough County Connected by 25 Initiative has evolved into a statewide technical assistance provider. It has offered technical assistance to multiple Florida counties and the state child welfare agency as well as to other states and localities nationwide.

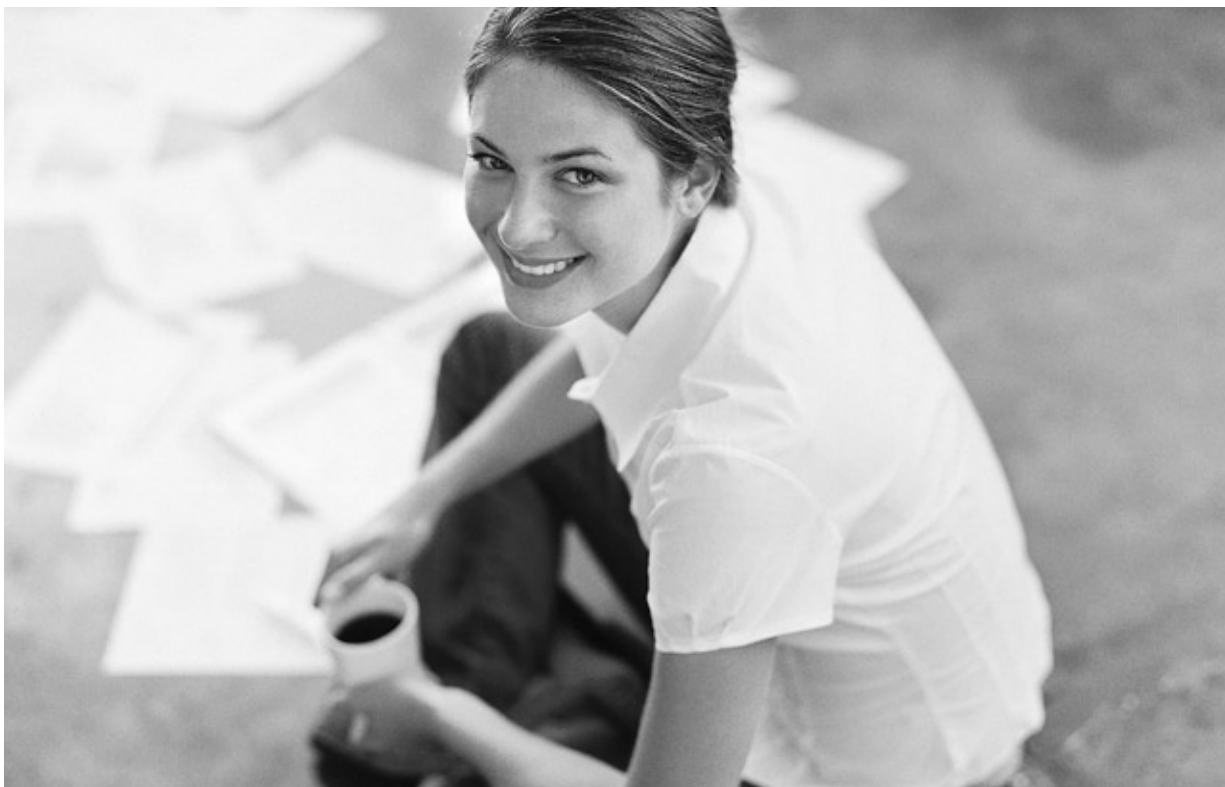
- In Florida, Hillsborough County Connected by 25 partnered with a judge to develop the Unified Court Project that is dedicated to reviewing cases of young people transitioning from foster care as well as cross-system youth who have both foster care and juvenile justice involvement. The Independent Living Court aims to ensure that young people are active participants in court reviews, focuses on transition planning, and seeks to divert young people from the juvenile justice system when possible.
- Indiana is partnering with a community development corporation, a private housing developer, and multiple private services providers to develop a supportive housing project for youth transitioning from foster care.

Connected by 25 projects have also contributed to **state legislative changes** as well as county child welfare policies governing **practice**.

- Florida Connected by 25 engaged a legislator who won enactment of legislation to expand Medicaid access until age 21. Young people participating in Connected by 25 were active advocates con-

tributing to the passage of the legislation. The initiative also implemented regulatory changes to address barriers to youth's success, including allowing youth to set up a checking/savings account, sign a lease, and get a driver's license without parental signature before they turn age 18. Children ages 16 and 17 who are adopted as teenagers also continue to keep their right to a free college education.

- California has seen a great deal of legislative activity addressing the needs of young people aging out of foster care. Individuals involved in CC25I have no doubt contributed to the legislative advocacy. However, the emphasis of CC25I has been to influence the policies that govern practice at the county level. For example, Fresno CC25I created the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender & Questioning Taskforce, which developed an antiharassment policy that currently is in the approval phase.



## Leveraging Resources to Sustain the Work

FCWG members invested in the demonstration sites with the expectation that local sites would leverage resources from multiple sources to support and ultimately sustain the work. Clearly, private funds can play a critical role in helping to influence systems, policies, and practices, but the durability and reach of those changes depend on the degree to which changes are institutionalized in existing systems. The current economic struggles of state and local governments and private funders challenge

efforts to leverage funds to sustain the work piloted by FCWG members. In these times, simply avoiding major cuts in funding to supports and services for young people aging out of foster care can be counted as a success. The poor economic climate also highlights the importance of influencing the use and redirection of existing resources in child welfare and related systems (e.g., education, workforce development and health and mental health), which has been a strong focus of all the sites.

### LEVERAGING RESOURCES

Calculating the exact amount of dollars leveraged across the Connected by 25 sites is extremely challenging for three reasons. First, particularly in California, the work of the initiative has been largely integrated into the overall work of county child welfare agencies. Thus, it is difficult to distinguish and attribute leverage to the Connected by 25 work as opposed to the broader work of county agencies. Second, sites have successfully influenced the way that funds supporting youth in and aging out of care are spent by changing the practice approach of those working with young people or the way staff time is allocated. These types of changes are difficult to quantify. Third, site leaders have contributed to policy changes that have led to broad new investments in young people aging out of foster care. Yet site leaders are just one of many individuals and organizations contributing to these changes. While it is not possible to develop a specific dollar figure that accurately describes the total overall leverage of the Connected by 25 Initiative across the three states, these notable examples of concrete leverage total more than \$8 million.

Connected by 25 in California includes eight separate county efforts, each of which have leveraged resources differently. The most common successful leverage strategy has been changing the way existing child welfare funds are used. In an online survey, five of eight county coordinators indicated that Connected by 25 had changed the way existing county child welfare funds were used and cited examples such as directing county funds to support a coordinator position or an educational liaison or directing Independent Living Program (ILP) funds to support individual development account match. Some counties also have succeeded in leveraging new funding. For example, the four early-implementing counties in California increased their drawdown of Transitional Housing Placement Plus funds from \$837,000 in fiscal 2006–2007 to more than \$6 million in fiscal 2008–2009.<sup>11</sup> Orange County also piloted a strategy for drawing down Title IV-E funds to support education services. Through a collaboration between its child welfare agency, the office of education foster youth services, and probation, existing funds in foster youth services and probation supporting education success for foster youth were identified that could draw down an additional \$250,000

<sup>11</sup> Sommer, Wu, and Mauldon, *California Connected by 25: Efforts to Address the Housing Needs of Transitioning Foster Youth*.



The core sustainability approaches that sites are taking to leverage needed resources vary depending on site structure and key players.

- In California, where county child welfare agencies function as the lead agencies, the sustainability of the work depends on the pilot implementation's influence on practice. It also depends on the degree to which county agencies can identify ways of supporting core functions and staff positions initially funded with private dollars with agency funds or other revenue streams.

- In Florida, the site structure has evolved to function as an intermediary that leverages resources from public and private players to pilot innovative approaches and then seeks to institutionalize those functions in public systems. Sustainability efforts focus on developing the buy-in among key players, partnerships, systems, and processes needed to ensure that practice change is maintained when the state office for Connected by 25 is no longer directly funding the work. Another challenge to long-term sustainability is how to support the “glue”—the capacity to connect and

annually in Title IV-E revenue. These dollars have enabled Orange County to double the number of social workers/educational liaisons addressing the education needs of foster youth.<sup>12</sup> Orange County has provided peer-to-peer training on this issue, and multiple California sites are now successfully increasing their drawdown of Title IV-E funds.

**Connected by 25 Florida** includes two sites in Brevard and Hillsborough Counties. Brevard County has just recently begun implementation and has not yet leveraged funding in addition to FCWG support. Hillsborough County has demonstrated significant success in leveraging funding in addition to the support of FCWG members to fund the Connected by 25 strategies, including:

- a one-time grant of \$45,000 in private grants to support a middle school guidance counselor;
- one-time private funding totaling \$187,500 to support the on-site General Educational Development (GED) program;
- ongoing funding from the Hillsborough County School District to support a high school guidance counselor dedicated to serving youth in foster care as well as in-kind support of the GED program;

- ongoing support from the court system to support the time of a staff person dedicated to serving young people in the Independent Living Court;
- in-kind support from community partners and individuals who have supported the development of “Door Openers” for young people;
- support from Hillsborough Kids, Inc., to help underwrite the Connected by 25 Hillsborough Connection with Education and Employment project; and
- initial project support for direct care staff from Eckerd Youth Alternatives—positions now funded by Hillsborough Kids, Inc.

**Indiana Connected by 25** has leveraged nearly \$1.8 million in public and private funding in addition to implementation funding from FCWG members. Funds include a one-time grant of \$20,000 from the Indianapolis Private Industry Council, \$1 million in economic stimulus funds to help develop a collaborative supportive housing project, and a three-year \$750,000 Chafee allocation from the state child services division. The Chafee funding is tenuous, however, because the state continues to struggle economically while trying to expand direct services for transitioning youth.

<sup>12</sup> Sommer, Wu, and Mauldon, *California Connected by 25: Efforts to Address the K–12 Educational Needs of Transitioning Foster Youth*.



coordinate the work. in order to continue the intermediary functions of developing and nurturing innovative models and supporting communities in bringing them to scale.

- In Indiana, the United Way that is serving as the lead agency has helped Connected by 25 leaders engage key leaders from public agencies as well as the private sector and leverage a diverse base of resources to support the pilot implementation. While implementation is still in the early stages, a core sustainability task will be moving from a base of support that is nearly 100 percent short-term grant funding to longer-term sources of support. Because most of the long-term funding sources support core public agency functions, achieving this sustainability task will likely involve aligning and institutionalizing the work with the work of public systems. In addition, United Way does not typically play a long-term role as an administrator of programs, so another important sustainability task will be identifying a future lead agency for the work.

Since inception, site leaders have had notable successes in leveraging resources to support the short-term implementation of the pilots (see Leveraging Resources on page 44) and in institutionalizing core components of the work into the policies and ongoing practices of public agencies. Although the outlook for sustainability for much of the Connected by 25 work is quite promising, the current economic climate is challenging site leaders' efforts to maintain and expand the base of support for this work as FCWG funding begins to phase out. The long-term outlook is less certain for sustaining functions and activities that have not been as easy to institutionalize, such as support for individual development account match funding and support for staff dedicated to coordinating the work.

### Lessons Learned

Following are lessons learned on leveraging resources to sustain the work.

- **Public- and private-sector partners have different strengths and can play complementary roles in leveraging funds if clear roles and responsibilities for leveraging funds are articulated.** The child welfare system controls the bulk of the core, long-term resources supporting services for youth in care and can allocate those resources to Connected by 25 support and services. Private agencies generally have greater fundraising capacity and ability to bring in funds from multiple private and public funders. This capacity is very important for supporting functions and services that are difficult to fund under existing child welfare or other public streams. For example, many of the California counties are struggling to identify a means of supporting IDAs. San Francisco County sought to address this challenge by creating a nonprofit organization charged with fundraising for both housing and individual development accounts.
- **Maintaining forward momentum in partnerships depends on institutionalizing services in a manner that maintains clear ongoing roles for the involvement of public- and private-sector partners.** In Florida and Indiana, where the approach is to pilot innovative approaches to serving young people and seek to institutionalize those approaches in public systems, it is important to maintain an ongoing role for the private partner once institutionalization has occurred. This helps ensure that practice does not return to business as usual and maintains the relationships that enable ongoing collaborative efforts.
- **Success in focusing the attention of state and federal policymakers on the challenges facing young people aging out of care has increased competition for scarce resources**



**in local communities.** During the pilot period, site leaders note they have witnessed an increasing number of entities competing for funds for supports and services for youth aging out of foster care. Ironically, they say the increased competition that is making sustainability more difficult for them is a product of successful advocacy efforts that have led policymakers to require multiple public and private entities to address the needs of foster youth and have led

new players into the field of initiatives serving youth transitioning from foster care. The growing field underscores the need for demonstration sites to continually engage in outreach to bring in new partners in order to support coordinated and cohesive services across the community.



# IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD

**The Connected by 25 Initiative has produced several impressive accomplishments across the sites.** Sites have demonstrated consistent and marked successes in:

- engaging young people as leaders and partners in decisionmaking;
- moving the focus of work with young people in foster care from beyond basic needs and safety to include attaining key outcomes;
- developing coordinated service efforts across public systems and with multiple private providers; and
- contributing to the development of public policies that expand services to young people in care, establish mandates for the provision of key transition and supportive services, and extend supports for young people as they move into adulthood.

Yet despite the significant successes of the past five years, the innovative efforts and practices documented in the demonstration communities are still the exception rather than the norm experienced by most young people in foster care across the nation.

The next stage of the work for leaders of FCWG and the Connected by 25 states and communities is to encourage the broad replication of successes from the Connected by 25 sites. This is an opportune moment for promoting and achieving greater scale in efforts to support youth transitioning from care. The recent federal Fostering Connections legislation creates new requirements for health, education, and permanency supports for young people in foster care and allows states to extend Title IV-E eligibility for foster care placement and case management services and adoption and guardianship subsidy to young adults until age 21. The lessons learned in the five years since FCWG members launched the demonstration initiative offer important implications for funders, policymakers, public officials, and program leaders working to grow and develop this important field of initiatives.

## Implications for Funders

Lessons learned from the demonstration hold these implications for funders.

- Coordinators across the sites say the high level of leadership and ongoing partnership in the initiative on the part of the funders played an important role in the success of their efforts. This was particularly true in the arena of influence on policies and the development of collaborative service provision efforts. Funders exerted significant influence on federal and state policies through complementary grant-making as well as through their ongoing leadership. Coordinators note that the benefit of these efforts was not

*Successful collaboration requires each funding partner to exhibit a willingness to be transparent, present, engaged, dedicated, intuitive, and flexible. In a true collaborative model, a portion of each foundation's individual autonomy and ownership of the work is diluted, and the power and value of the collective voice is the added benefit.*

—Tina Gridiron-Smith, FCWG member, and senior program officer, Lumina Foundation for Education

simply that the funders exerted influence but also that they helped create a context that increased local coordinators' ability to influence state and local practices, policies, and system coordination. **Funders interested in replicating the successes of the demonstration initiative or in promoting any system reform endeavor should consider how their own efforts to influence practice, policy, and coordination can increase the reach of their grant-making.**

- The funders involved in the demonstration communities were able to play such an important role in

the ongoing implementation and influence of these projects, in part, because of the FCWG collaboration. FCWG brought together national, regional, and local funders with a shared interest in supporting successful transitions for youth from foster care. National funders were able to increase national attention on the need for supports for youth in transition and increase the level of resources invested in the sites, while local and regional funders were able to play a strong role in influencing state policy and the ongoing implementation of the work. **The collaborative successes of FCWG suggest that partnerships among funders, particularly national and regional and local funders, hold significant promise for increasing the impact of foundation initiatives.**

- FCWG seems to have created a **successful structure for supporting collaboration among grant-makers** in the demonstration sites. Critical factors contributing to this successful collaboration include:
  - taking time initially to establish a shared vision and logic model to guide collaborative work;
  - making the vision and model broad enough and taking a flexible approach in the design of the Connected by 25 sites so funders with varying programmatic and geographic emphases could work together; and
  - supporting the ongoing facilitated structure of FCWG, which provided a forum where FCWG members could continue to assess and adjust their coordinated efforts as the work in the sites evolved.
- **Funders found that establishing good data systems to track outcome data on young people transitioning from care takes significant time and investment.** Across all the Connected by 25 sites, at the start of this work there were no systematic efforts to collect data on outcomes for young people in and transitioning out of foster care. Consequently, FCWG members seeking to evaluate the effectiveness of their investments had to rely on very limited information from existing sources or build data systems from the ground up. When collecting data from existing sources, evaluators faced the challenges of limited information, confidentiality barriers, and limited systematic ability to aggregate data from multiple systems. When building from the ground up, evaluators faced the challenges associated with developing realistic and meaningful measures, getting buy-in of staff and leadership to use data systems, establishing protocols for data collection and entry that are not too burdensome for staff, and developing information management systems that are compatible with and can pull from other existing data systems. These tasks took significantly longer than funders originally anticipated.

State efforts are now under way to implement the federally mandated National Youth in Transition Database that will track data on youth outcomes for youth in transition across all states. This should

improve the outcome data available on youth in transition. However, **funders undertaking new investments targeting youth in transition should still begin with a careful assessment of what data are available and how difficult it will be to access existing data. They can then establish realistic timeframes and budgets for data collection if evaluation is a priority.**

## Implications for Policymakers and Public Agency Officials

Lessons learned from the demonstration hold these implications for policymakers and public agency officials.

- A central tenet of the Connected by 25 demonstration work is to engage young people in developing the policies, regulations, and practice guidelines that so critically affect their lives. Policymakers and public agency officials from the Connected by 25 demonstration communities shared the powerful motivating impact that hearing directly from young people had on them. Leaders of the sites say that real engagement by young people in policy development and program design qualitatively changes the substance of policies and programs, grounding them in the priorities and realities young people face. **Policymakers and public officials who want to contribute to better outcomes for young people should begin by seeking avenues for substantive and ongoing input by young people in the development of policy, regulatory, and programmatic changes.**

- The work in the demonstration communities highlights the gap between the development of policies that offer new supports and services and actual changes in practice in response to those policies. Public agency officials struggle to change practice, because policy changes do not always include the resources necessary to support implementation of practice change. Moreover, the resources public agency officials have in their control are so restrictive that it is difficult to reallocate them to support new priorities and staff positions.

**Policymakers can help ensure that the policies they enact translate into improved practice by making sure policy measures contain the resources needed for implementation. In addition, policymakers should offer the flexible resources that leaders need** to support the coordination efforts, new staff functions, and changes in systems and processes so frequently necessary to change practice. **Including strong reporting and accountability measures** in policy changes can also help ensure the policy changes lead to changes in practice.

Public agency officials can improve their ability to effectively respond to policy changes and improve practice by **seeking out public-private partnerships** with foundations or other local players interested in partnering on reform efforts. Private partners can bring flexible resources that can be used to fill gaps in the public funding streams that support this work.

- A critical contribution of the Connected by 25 demonstration initiatives was to spur new coordination efforts between child welfare and other public agencies. Innovative service coordination efforts emerged between child welfare and the education, mental health, juvenile justice, and workforce investment systems. The successful coordination efforts suggest that **child welfare agency leaders should pursue coordination efforts with other public systems that are targeted to achieving specific outcomes for young people.** Taking the time to establish the formal systems, processes, and agreements to support successful coordination is worth the effort expended.



## Implications for Child Welfare Program Leaders

Lessons learned from the demonstration hold these implications for child welfare program leaders.

- Stakeholders in the Connected by 25 sites repeatedly note the **critical role that engaging young people** as partners in service design and ongoing case planning played in improving practice. A basic starting point for program leaders interested in improving outcomes for young people is to make an honest assessment of the degree to which program practice supports real youth engagement and leadership and make improvements.
- The experience of the Connected by 25 demonstration communities highlights the critical role program leaders can play in influencing policies and practices. Program leaders have an in-depth understanding of the needs of young people as well as the barriers to improved practice. Program leaders interested in improving outcomes for young people should play a proactive role in influencing policy by **tracking and**

**contributing to legislative debates and ensuring the young people they serve contribute to those debates.** Private program leaders should seek to influence public systems not simply by pointing out failings or weaknesses in those systems, but also by **identifying potential solutions and seeking to work in partnership with system leaders** in implementing those solutions.

- Program leaders who are working to sustain privately funded initiatives focused on young people aging out of care must **seek to align and institutionalize their work with that of relevant public systems.** Successful efforts to institutionalize components of

*The FCWG collaboration included the actual intended beneficiaries—namely, the alumni. As a collaborative effort, the message of inclusive participation and value of perspective echoed beyond the chambers of our hotel meeting rooms into the hallways of numerous boards and nonprofits. This may be the part of our legacy with the largest impact.*

—David Ambroz, FCWG member and foster care alumnus

the Connected by 25 work were marked by a clear understanding of how components fit within a larger child welfare reform context, initial investment of private-sector resources in public systems, and careful tracking and communicating of data on results.



# CONCLUSION

**FCWG members launched the Connected by 25 demonstration to enlist stakeholders in communities nationwide in pursuing the vision and testing the strategies presented in the *Connected by 25* investment plan.** Clearly, they have succeeded in that endeavor, creating new awareness, new champions, and new and innovative program models focused on youth transitioning from foster care. The work in the 11 Connected by 25 demonstration communities continues to grow and evolve. Leaders of more mature sites that began their implementation four to five years ago are focused on refining, expanding, and sustaining their work, while other sites are just beginning implementation. With the continuing interest of policymakers and passage of supportive federal and state legislation, the initial *Connected by 25* vision and investment plan are perhaps more relevant than ever. The experiences in the demonstration communities offer rich lessons for funders, policymakers, and program leaders that can inform the continued development of supports and services that help young people in or aging out of foster care achieve successful outcomes.

## Acknowledgements

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This publication incorporates and builds on previous evaluation work supported by members of FCWG. Lumina Foundation for Education supported The Finance Project in evaluating the Breaking the Cycle Projects, which included education support components in the Connected by 25 sites. Data gathered for that evaluation informed the identification of lessons learned. In addition, the California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I) has included a systems change assessment that has analyzed lessons learned through implementation of CC25I. Heidi Sommer, the lead investigator for the systems change assessment in California, generously shared her time, data, and thoughts to inform the development of this publication. Review of the systems change assessment reports contributed to the identification of lessons learned and examples highlighted from the California sites.

The goal of this report was to gather, synthesize, and distill the major lessons that Connected by 25 leaders have learned through the collaborative endeavor of FCWG members in the demonstration communities. Given the breadth of the Connected by 25 vision, and variation in the implementation of that vision across the demonstration sites, the focus of data collection was to identify broad themes that emerged related to operationalizing the components of the Connected by 25 logic model: program implementation in the five strategy areas; project influence on practice, systems, and policies; and project leverage and sustainability. To identify key themes, authors gathered information from a number of sources:

**Evaluation data and reports**—FCWG members have supported multiple evaluation efforts focused on the specific components of the demonstration work in which they invest.

- Lumina Foundation for Education, which funded education supports in Florida and Indiana, contracted with The Finance Project to develop a retrospective evaluation examining successes and lessons learned in supporting interventions to help youth in foster care finish high school, and enter and complete postsecondary education. The Finance Project drew from the qualitative and quantitative data developed on the work in Florida and Indiana to identify lessons learned to include in this report.
- The funders supporting the California sites have funded two data collection and evaluation components: 1) UC Berkeley’s Center for Social Services Research (CSSR), in partnership with the California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I) counties, developed an overall youth outcomes framework for CC25I and an on-line data tracking system, using the efforts-to-outcomes (ETO) platform developed by Social Solutions. In addition, the funders supporting CC25I have supported a team at UC Berkeley’s Goldman School of Public Policy to conduct a systems change assessment that has produced a series of reports documenting the implementation of each of the CC25I strategies and best practices for implementing effective programs for transition age youth in foster care.<sup>1</sup> Given the overlap with the CC25I systems change assessment and this report, The Finance Project staff worked closely with the lead researcher for the systems change assessment in identifying appropriate information and data to inform overall lessons learned in this report.
- The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (JCYOI) is supporting implementation of community partnership boards, youth leadership boards and the Opportunity Passport™ in Florida and Indiana and has provided technical assistance and support for implementation of financial literacy training and Individual Development Accounts (IDA’s) in California. JCYOI is contracting with Metis Associates to support site efforts to implement self-evaluation tools and processes. Data collection efforts include an on-line data system to track IDA savings and asset purchases and an ongoing participant survey that measures outcome data. Florida and Indiana are implementing self-evaluation measures with JCYOI support, and JCYOI staff have provided technical assistance and tools to California sites specific to tracking the IDA work. JCYOI also funded Cornerstone Consulting to produce a report on leverage achieved by the JCYOI sites, which was reviewed by the authors to inform the development of this report.
- Eckerd Family Foundation, a core funder of the work in Florida, funded the development of a data tracking system that collects youth and system

<sup>1</sup> The CC25I Systems Change Assessment Team. *California Connected by 25: An Introduction to the Initiative*. Berkeley, CA: UC Berkeley’s Center for Child and Youth Policy, October, 2007.

outcomes. The software system developed by the Florida Cby25 Initiative also tracks the “quality” of services provided to youth and includes a module to be utilized by youth to provide their view of the services provided. The data system meets the National Youth in Transition Database data collection requirements.

**Interviews with state-level coordinators—**

Staff conducted phone interviews with coordinators of sites in each of the three demonstration states. These interviews included coordinators at the state level in Florida, California, and Indiana.

**On-line survey of site coordinators—**

Staff conducted an on-line survey of each of the county level coordinators of Connected by 25 across the three states. The on-line survey posed questions regarding the initial planning; initiative governance

and management; implementation of programmatic strategies; influence on public policies, practice, and systems; and leverage.

**Review of site background documents—**

State coordinators provided staff with various helpful secondary documents including funder proposals and reports, descriptive information on key strategies, and reports documenting key accomplishments.

Staff reviewed and analyzed information from the above multiple sources to identify the basic descriptive information and lessons learned that are presented in this report.

| WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SUSTAIN?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | HOW WILL YOU MEASURE YOUR PROGRESS?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
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| <p><b>VISION AND DESIRED RESULTS</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p><b>INDICATORS</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <p><b>Vision</b><br/>“Connected by 25” to resources for economic success.</p> <p><b>Investment Plan Desired Results</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Impact:</b> Young people leaving the foster care system are economically self-sustaining by age 25.</li> <li><b>Influence:</b> Communities and systems offer adequate resources, public policies, programs, and reforms to ensure that young people have the necessary preparation and support to manage on their own and achieve economic success.</li> <li><b>Leverage:</b> Create significant, positive leverage to increase the amount of public and private resources supporting foster youth making the transition to adulthood.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p><b>Impact on young people</b></p> <p><b>Education indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Rates of high school completion.</li> <li>■ Rates of GED attainment.</li> <li>■ Rates of completion of post-secondary education or vocational training.</li> <li>■ Rates of completion of graduate degrees.</li> </ul> <p><b>Education interim indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Percent of youth at grade level.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth prepared to enter post-secondary education or vocational training.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth entering graduate education.</li> </ul> <p><b>Workforce development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Rates of employment.</li> <li>■ Rates of job retention.</li> <li>■ Percent in jobs that support the individual/family.</li> </ul> <p><b>Workforce development interim indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Rates of part-time employment.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth who demonstrate employment progression.</li> </ul> <p><b>Financial competency</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Percent of youth who stay within personal budgets.</li> <li>■ Rate of credit and loan acquisition.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth who avoid bankruptcy.</li> </ul> <p><b>Workforce development Interim indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Percent of youth completing financial literacy course.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth who maintain clean credit ratings for one year.</li> </ul> <p><b>Acquisition of savings and assets</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Acquisition of savings and assets</li> <li>■ Amount of savings and assets acquired.</li> </ul> <p><b>Acquisition of savings and assets interim indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Percent of youth saving money using youth IDAs.</li> </ul> <p><b>Entrepreneurship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Rate of business start-ups</li> <li>■ Knowledge about how to start a business venture</li> </ul> <p><b>Entrepreneurship interim indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Percent of youth in entrepreneurial training</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>CONDITIONS AND CAUSES</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p><b>Individual Youth</b></p> <p><b>Psychosocial</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Depression and other long-term emotional problems due to neglect, trauma, and removal from families.</li> <li>■ Lack of confidence and sense of self-efficacy.</li> </ul> <p><b>Educational Achievement and Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Academic disruption and shifting school enrollment related to multiple foster care placements.</li> <li>■ Low school attendance and achievement.</li> <li>■ Lack of good role models for academic success and educational achievement.</li> <li>■ Lack of academic support and advocacy.</li> <li>■ Lack of opportunities and support for post-secondary education.</li> </ul> <p><b>Employability and Employment Experience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ High unemployment among former foster youth.</li> <li>■ Lack of part-time work opportunities during foster care.</li> <li>■ Lack of good employment and career role models.</li> <li>■ Lack of possibilities to learn about an array of career possibilities and what is required to pursue them.</li> </ul> <p><b>Financial Competency and Security</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ High rate of poverty among former foster youth.</li> <li>■ Lack of good role models for responsible financial behavior.</li> <li>■ Lack of opportunities to learn about personal financial management over time, through developmentally-appropriate hands-on experiences.</li> <li>■ Inability to accumulate assets while in foster care.</li> <li>■ Lack of good role models for savings and asset accumulation.</li> </ul> <p><b>Public Policy and Community Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Lack of public awareness of the challenges faced by young people leaving care.</li> <li>■ Inadequate funding for services and supports to prepare foster youth for independent living and to support former foster youth in transition.</li> <li>■ Poor coordination across systems serving youth, including child welfare, the courts, K-12 and post-secondary education, employment and training, and financial systems.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Influence: Systems Indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Strategies and activities supporting young people transitioning from foster care are coordinated and jointly supported among education, employment, child welfare, and other systems.</li> <li>■ Policy changes at the federal, state, and local level promote economic success for foster youth.</li> <li>■ Reduced number of educational placements for foster youth.</li> <li>■ A continuum of services and supports available to youth 14–24 who are in foster care or leaving foster care.</li> </ul> <p><b>Leverage: Community Indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Increased public awareness of the needs of young people leaving foster care and of strategies to address them.</li> <li>■ Increased public funding and private-sector investment in resources for foster youth and young people making the transition to adulthood and independence.</li> <li>■ Creation of “door opener” opportunities for former foster youth to gain access to supports and services and other resources in their communities to help them achieve economic success.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

| STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | PERFORMANCE MEASURES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
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| <b>Strategy 1: Advocate and Support Educational Achievement</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <p><b>Investment activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Support comprehensive community initiatives that connect young people to effective academic support.</li> <li>■ Support programs providing enrichment and cultural activities for young people.</li> <li>■ Support policies that increase educational stability.</li> <li>■ Develop and support educational advocates.</li> <li>■ Evaluate and document K-12 and post-secondary educational programs successful in linking youth to under-graduate and graduate educational success.</li> <li>■ Fund research on foster youth involvement with education, including baseline data on achievement, enrollment, dropouts, graduation, participation in enrichment activities, enrollment in and completion of post-secondary education: barriers and facilitators of school performance; and inter-relationships with the child welfare, judicial, and employment systems.</li> <li>■ Fund activities to develop public policies, build public support, and educate policy makers about the educational challenges of foster youth and what is needed to overcome the barriers.</li> </ul>                 | <p><b>Measures of effort (all strategies)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Number of youth and young people participating in each component of comprehensive initiatives.</li> <li>■ Number of agencies and organizations participating in comprehensive initiatives.</li> <li>■ Value of resources dedicated to efforts.</li> <li>■ Number of services and supports offered young people.</li> <li>■ Number of young people who retain stable educational placement.</li> <li>■ Number of young people with education advocates.</li> <li>■ Number of research studies funded.</li> <li>■ Number of new/improved federal, state, and local policies supporting or funding transitional youth.</li> <li>■ Number of foster home and school placements per youth.</li> <li>■ Number of stories in the local media about youth transitioning from foster care.</li> <li>■ Number of support services available to young people.</li> <li>■ Percent of initiatives receiving requested technical assistance.</li> </ul> <p><b>Measures of effect—Strategy 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Percent of youth at or above grade level.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth with improved test scores.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth taking college preparatory courses.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth completing vocational training.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth entering two- and four-year post-secondary education.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Strategy 2: Facilitate and Create Access to Workforce Development Opportunities</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <p><b>Investment activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Support comprehensive community initiatives that connect young people to employment preparation activities and jobs.</li> <li>■ Support a continuum of age-specific employment services, including development of positive work habits and attitudes; volunteer work; job search skills, subsidized work; and internships, part-time work, focused skills training, and career development programs targeting young people in or leaving foster care.</li> <li>■ Evaluate and document employment development programs successful in linking youth to employment and careers.</li> <li>■ Support research on foster youth and employment including baseline data on employment status, retention, job training, work history and pay; barriers and facilitators of employment; and inter-relationships with the child welfare, judicial, and K-12 and post-secondary education systems.</li> <li>■ Fund activities to develop public policies, build public support, and educate policy makers about the employment challenges of young people leaving care and how to overcome the barriers.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Measures of effect—Strategy 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Percent of youth with part-time jobs.</li> <li>■ Percent retaining jobs for six months.</li> <li>■ Percent completing job search or skills training programs.</li> <li>■ Percent moving into higher-skilled, higher paid jobs.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Strategy 3: Provide Financial Literacy Education</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <p><b>Investment activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Support comprehensive community initiatives that include financial education opportunities for young people.</li> <li>■ Support development and implementation of programs and curricula providing personal financial education and skills.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p><b>Measures of effect—Strategy 3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Percent of youth completing financial education programs.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth with bank accounts.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth acquiring and maintaining credit.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth successfully managing their personal finances (i.e. regularly paying rent, keeping current on loans, meeting financial obligations, having money left at the end of the month).</li> <li>■ Percent of youth successfully using and maintaining debit accounts for a minimum of one year.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

| STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES (continued)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | PERFORMANCE MEASURES (continued)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
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| <b>Strategy 4: Encourage Savings and Asset Accumulation</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <p><b>Investment activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Support comprehensive community initiatives that include matched savings accounts (youth Individual Development Accounts), debit card accounts, and other activities aimed at increasing assets.</li> <li>■ Support development and implementation of programs that promote accumulation of savings and assets.</li> <li>■ Evaluate and document programs successful in increasing savings and assets.</li> <li>■ Support research on foster youth and asset development including baseline data on knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to savings and asset accumulation; patterns of building savings and assets; barriers and facilitators; and inter-relationships with the child welfare, judicial, employment, K-12 and post-secondary education systems, and financial systems.</li> <li>■ Fund activities to develop public policies, build public support and educate policy makers about the financial challenges of young people leaving care and how to overcome the barriers.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Measures of Effect—Strategy 4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Percent of youth meeting established savings goals within one year.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth maintaining IDAs for a minimum of one year.</li> <li>■ Value of savings and other assets accumulated over six months, one year, and three years.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Strategy 5: Create Entrepreneurship Opportunities</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <p><b>Investment activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Support comprehensive community initiatives that include entrepreneurship training and support; development of capital for business start-ups and other supports for young people interested in starting their own businesses.</li> <li>■ Support development and implementation of programs that promote entrepreneurship among young people.</li> <li>■ Evaluate and document programs successful in increasing business start-ups among young people leaving foster care.</li> <li>■ Support research on foster youth and entrepreneurship including baseline data on knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to starting a business; patterns of building savings and assets; barriers and facilitators; and inter-relationships with the child welfare, judicial, employment, K-12 and post-secondary education systems, and financial systems.</li> <li>■ Fund activities to develop public policies, build public support, and educate policy makers about entrepreneurship.</li> </ul>            | <p><b>Measures of Effect—Strategy 5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Percent of youth completing entrepreneurial training.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth who can achieve passing grade on test of business start-up knowledge.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth completing business plans.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth who have acquired necessary capital to start their own businesses.</li> <li>■ Percent of youth who successfully operate their own businesses.</li> </ul> |

## History, Funding, Organizational Structure, and Approach to Work

### *California- Improving Services From Within County Child Welfare Agencies<sup>2</sup>*

#### **HISTORY**

In 2004, parallel to the efforts of the FCWG, representatives of the Annie E. Casey foundation, Walter S. Johnson Foundation, and the Stuart Foundation came together to explore the creation of an initiative that would build the continuum of care for California's transitioning youth. Each of the foundations had a long history of philanthropic investment in youth development and child welfare services. The Annie E. Casey Foundation had been funding the Family to Family (F2F) initiative—a nationwide child welfare reform initiative that provides principals, goals, strategies and tools to help state and local child welfare agencies achieve better outcomes for children and families—since 1992. The Walter S. Johnson and Stuart Foundations had been funding employment training, postsecondary education, permanency, and educational advocacy programs for youth in foster care.

Together, these three foundations developed the concept of creating an additional F2F strategy in California, focusing on expanding the supports for youth in foster care transitioning to adulthood. The new F2F strategy was to be called the Foster Youth Transitions Initiative (FYTI). By the end of 2004, Fresno, San Francisco, and Stanislaus Counties had begun the application process to become FYTI counties.

Over the course of 2005, a partnership developed between FYTI and the FCWG. The goals of FYTI closely aligned with those of the national Connected by 25 Initiative, and the funders decided to integrate these separate efforts. FYTI was renamed

the California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I). Throughout 2005, CC25I went through a number of transitions as the funders and stakeholders in the sites worked on initial planning and development of the initiative. The Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation, originally planning to fund an Oakland site agreed to fund wider Alameda County. However, due to a shift in the foundation's funding priorities, The Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation transitioned out of the FCWG in 2005 and did not continue as a core funder of CC25I. Likewise, after its first full year as part of CC25I, Alameda County transitioned out of CC25I to focus more strongly on local needs and priorities. In June 2005, Santa Clara County agreed to join CC25I, bringing the number of participating California counties to four.

Between late 2005 and early 2007, the four counties finalized their planning and began implementing local CC25I strategies. In 2007, Humboldt and Orange Counties also joined the initiative, followed by Solano County in September 2008 and Glenn County in 2009.

#### **CORE STRATEGIES**

In alignment with the national Connected by 25 Initiative, CC25I developed a logic model tailored to the needs of California. The CC25I logic model focuses on seven key areas:

- K-12 Education;
- Employment/Job Training/Post-Secondary Education;
- Financial Competency and Asset Development;
- Housing;
- Independent Living Skills Programs;
- Personal/Social Asset Development; and
- Permanency.

<sup>2</sup> This overview was informed by review of the following introductory document created by the California Systems Change Assessment Team: *The California Connected by 25: An Introduction to the Initiative*. Berkeley, CA: UC Berkeley's Center for Child and Youth Policy, October, 2007.



While counties are given the flexibility to direct CC25I resources to where they are most needed, they must demonstrate how their current service system and planned activities address all seven focus areas.

#### **FUNDING**

California counties participating in CC25I receive grants of \$150,000 a year for three years to leverage and maximize other federal, state, and local funding resources to support the implementation and sustainability of the initiative. Counties also have the option to receive \$10,000 a year for three years to establish Individual Development Accounts (IDA's) to teach youth savings and asset development behavior.

- **The Walter S. Johnson Foundation, Stuart Foundation, and William and Flora Hewlett Foundation** have provided core support for grants for the CC25I counties, technical assistance, evaluation, and management of the CC25I outcomes tracking database.
- **Annie E. Casey Foundation** has provided in-kind management support and technical assistance through integration of the initiative with the Family to Family (F2F) strategies and activities.
- The **Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative** has provided in-kind support in the form of management information systems and technical assistance regarding IDA's.

As CC25I has evolved with a focus on sustainability and institutionalization within the child welfare system, leaders have made some adjustments to the funding structure. The four initial implementing counties (Fresno, Santa Clara, San Francisco, and Stanislaus Counties), whose initial three year grants expired in early to mid 2009 were extended additional grant support at a lower level through 2010. In addition, the funders are supporting new sites added after 2007 (including Glenn and Solano Counties) at a lower level than the initial implementing counties.

Finally, the funders have also supported access to a technical assistance pool overseen by the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) at University of California-Berkeley. The technical assistance pool supports workshops and convenings that respond to particular challenges in the seven strategy areas, as well as system improvement efforts.

#### **INITIATIVE STRUCTURE**

At the state level, CC25I is managed by a Project Manager and Integration Director, who seek to bring the CC25I system improvement approaches to scale in California. The CC25I Self-Evaluation Lead and Systems Evaluator at University of California-Berkeley and the Youth Alumni Technical Assistant are also critical members of the state team. CC25I funders also have a high-level of involvement with the initiative, and monthly meetings with the management team, evaluators and the primary funders serve as the state-level steering committee.

At the county-level, the public child welfare agency serves as the lead for each participating CC25I county. Typically, they convene a broad-based advisory group to provide input on the governance of the initiative. Prior to becoming a CC25I county, counties engage in a comprehensive self-assessment process to determine how to prioritize program focus areas and develop CC25I strategies to create a continuum of care and support. The self-assessment requires child welfare leaders to work collaboratively with many stakeholders, including:

- independent living programs;
- school districts;
- workforce investment boards;
- juvenile courts;
- health care providers;
- mental health services;
- transitional and supportive housing providers;
- families and caregivers; and
- youth in foster care.

Philanthropic interests, local corporations, and other interested community members may also play important roles. Once sites have moved beyond the self-assessment phase, these stakeholders are usually represented on site advisory boards or workgroups, though the specific composition and level of activity of advisory boards varies from site to site. By working together, community partners identify overlapping interests, leverage available resources, and contribute to shared outcomes.

CC25I counties participate in on-going self-evaluation activities. CC25I leaders developed and have implemented a web-based data collection system to track youth outcomes and transition services. Technical assistance to implement this data tracking system is provided by UC Berkeley's Center for Social Services Research.

*For More Information on the California Connected by 25 Initiative contact: James Anderson, Project Manager, California Connected by 25 Initiative, 408-916-7479, jamesanderson.cc25i@gmail.com*

## **Florida—Innovation and Collaboration within a Privatized Child Welfare Structure**

### **HISTORY**

In 2000, Florida undertook a major child welfare reform effort that privatized the service delivery system with a focus on community-based care. As a result, each county in Florida has one lead agency that receives and administers all of the child welfare funding for the jurisdiction. Hillsborough Kids, Inc. (HKI) is the lead community-based care agency in Hillsborough County. In 2003, Florida's Department of Children and Families transitioned the responsibility for youth services to the Community-Based Care agencies. In turn, HKI contracted with Camelot Community Care, a local child welfare service

provider agency, to serve as the county's independent living services provider.

The following year, Eckerd Family Foundation, a member of the FCWG, approached HKI about becoming a Connected by 25 site, and HKI reached out to Camelot Community Care to lead the project. The timing was fortuitous, as HKI gained access to flexible, private dollars to support transitioning youth just as they were charged with building an independent living program in the county.

In the first year of the initiative in Hillsborough County, Connected by 25 focused on implementing a business plan that site leaders developed based on the Connected by 25 logic model and with an emphasis on ensuring that existing state policies focused on supporting transitioning youth were put into practice. Site leaders developed the business plan through an internal process with significant input from young people in and aging out of care. Site leaders approached partners to carry out the business plan as needed.

In 2006, the Hillsborough County Connected by 25 initiative became a Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative co-investment site, adding additional technical support and a new focus on financial literacy and asset development. In 2007, Brevard County also launched work as a Connected by 25 site. That same year, Connected by 25 became a non-profit separate from Camelot Community Care, although the agency continues to do some back office work for the initiative. Establishing Connected by 25 as a separate non-profit provided the structural vehicle appropriate to the evolving role of Connected by 25 as a state-level intermediary and advocate for supportive policies and services for young people transitioning from foster care.

**CORE STRATEGIES**

In Florida, Connected by 25 focuses on engaging youth, and public and private partners to improve outcomes through investments in services and programs. A young person who is Connected by 25 in Florida has attained the following critical outcomes:

- Preparation for economic success, building assets in education, employment training/skills and financial savings.
- Connection to an ongoing and committed positive support system which includes informal and formal adult and community supports.
- The ability to contribute economically and socially in their community.

Florida Connected by 25 has implemented several strategies in close partnership with the county child welfare community-based care entity, the K-12 education system, and the courts:

- Educational supports that include: a high school **guidance counselor** who provides dedicated educational planning to youth in foster care throughout the District; an **on-site school** that provides individualized and flexible GED instruction targeted to a small number of youth transitioning from care who are at less than a 6th grade reading level; and **support and guidance encouraging young people to apply for, attend, and complete postsecondary education.**
- The **Independent Living Transition Services Court** is a court dedicated to serving young people preparing to transition from care and/or those involved with the juvenile justice system. The court takes a proactive approach to ensuring that young people aging out of care receive needed services to prepare for independence, and that there is a coordinated, cross-system approach to serving young people who are involved in both the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

- The **Opportunity Passport™**, which includes a personal debit account to be used to pay for short-term expenses, an Individual Development Account (IDA), to be used for specific assets, and Door Openers which are connections to individuals and organizations in the community that offer positive opportunities for career, personal, or educational advancement.
- **Housing supports** that include a partnership with the Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County through which a staff person is dedicated to increasing the availability of housing options for youth aging out of care; and a partnership with the Florida Housing Finance Corporation to ensure that youth aging out of foster care access low income, section 8 and tax credit housing.
- **Employment supports** that include employment of an on-site vocational development specialist, and ongoing employment preparation trainings. Connected by 25 also partners with the University of Tampa, and area employers to offer training and links to employment for young people and has received a Workforce grant to support school to career work aimed at foster youth in Hillsborough County in partnership with Hillsborough County School System.
- **Dedicated transition staff** to provide ongoing case management and transition planning for youth transitioning from care.
- **Transportation supports**, including bus passes for youth attending on-site education or employment programs and a partnership with the “Wheels to the Future” program that provides a car, one year maintenance and AAA roadside assistance to youth. Connected by 25 provides funds for insurance and registration.
- **Promoting permanency** through successfully advocating for and then working on implementation of a Florida law that allows subsidized independent living placements for youth in foster care ages 16–17 to include unlicensed settings (family, coach, transition program).

- Supporting **personal development** through the “Reach for the Stars” scholarship program which offers youth age 14–24 dollars to pay for personal development activities such as camp, music/dance lessons, computers, etc. The youth must pay back in community service hours the value of their scholarship.
- **Statewide Technical Assistance and Training** which is offered through two mechanisms:
  - The **Policy to Practice (P2P) Academy** is a partnership with Connected by 25 staff and certified youth trainers between the ages of 13 to 21 to develop and deliver training workshops which target effective strategies for implementing laws and policies that serve transitioning youth in Florida’s foster care system. Trainings are for youth, child welfare staff and foster parents.
  - The CBY25 initiative statewide nonprofit provides training and technical assistance to those interested in replicating Connected by 25 strategies in Florida and beyond. They have developed a hands-on skills assessment approved for use by the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF). DCF is contracting with CBY25 to provide training throughout the state. Cby25 has also partnered with the Office of Florida Supreme Court to deliver regional trainings to judges and court staff.

#### **FUNDERS**

Multiple funders have worked closely together to implement Connected by 25 Florida’s theory of change. Supporters of Connected by 25 in Florida include the following.

- The **Eckerd Family Foundation** is the lead funder and has partnered with HKI to provide services locally.
- The **Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative** supports implementation of the Opportunity Passport™, providing a management

information system, evaluation support and technical assistance.

- The **Lumina Foundation for Education** contributed funds for education supports including initial funding to pilot the guidance counselor position, and support for postsecondary education specialists.
- The **Annie E. Casey Foundation** is contributing technical assistance and evaluation resources.

In addition to the initial FCWG supporters, leaders of Connected by 25 Florida have succeeded in developing funds from a number of local funders including: the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay, the United Way of Tampa Bay, Triad Foundation, Inc., Conn Memorial Foundation, Junior League of Tampa, Lightning Foundation, Allegany Franciscan Foundation, Lerner Family Foundation, the Frank E. Duckwall Foundation, the Children’s Board of Hillsborough County, the Al Oddis Family, and the Clark Family Foundation. A subcontract from Eckerd Youth Alternatives also provided critical support for the initial development of Connected by 25 including hiring and training transition specialists.

#### **INITIATIVE STRUCTURE**

In Florida, the Connected by 25 Initiative has evolved from acting primarily as the manager of the Hillsborough County site, to a statewide and national capacity-builder and provider of technical assistance. Based on their experience, their many successes, and the strong reputation they achieved in the state, CBY25 began providing technical assistance to multiple counties, The Florida Department of Children and Families, and the court system in the Florida, as well as multiple community and state agencies throughout the country. In Brevard County, they guided the planning and development of a Connected by 25 site and continue to oversee the Hillsborough site and the Brevard site. In this capacity, CBY25 collects, analyzes, and reports outcome data; and supports site leadership. The initiative’s key partners include the Department of

Children and Families, the education system, Eckerd Family Foundation and other private funders, the court system, the Homeless Coalition, and the Children's Board.

Each Connected by 25 county has a Community Partnership Board, Youth Leadership Board, and site coordinator. Although site coordinators are selected by the Community Partnership Board and serve at their pleasure, site coordinators are employed by the state Cby25 Initiative. Community Partnership Boards shape the initiative on an ongoing basis and the state office is there to continuously support and drive improvement at the local level.

*For More Information on the Florida Connected by 25 Initiative contact: Diane Zambito, Executive Director, Connected by 25, 813-228-0731, info@cby25.org*

### **Indiana—Working Toward a Comprehensive Community Vision for Change**

#### **HISTORY**

In June 2003, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (JCYOI) and Lumina Foundation for Education staff convened local stakeholders in Marion County, Indiana to discuss the well being of foster youth transitioning from the child welfare system to adulthood.

In July 2004, as an outcome of the convening, and with funding from Lumina Foundation for Education, the United Way of Central Indiana (UWCI) launched the *Foster Youth Transitioning to Adulthood Project* to assess the community's capacity to positively support youth in foster care as they transition to adulthood. A multi-disciplinary community work group produced an environmental scan, as well as a comprehensive community plan, which contained expected outcomes and recommendations for

action. The comprehensive community plan was a blueprint to guide an implementation phase.

In February 2005, a time-limited steering committee was appointed to develop the corresponding implementation plan. In the summer of 2005, the Steering Committee made recommendations to UWCI that were approved by the Executive Committee. These recommendations included approval to adopt *Connected by 25: A Marion County Foster Youth Project Community Plan*.

In the spring of 2006, a permanent Steering Committee began meeting to oversee implementation of the project. Throughout late 2006 and early 2007, Steering Committee meetings focused on educating committee members on the issues and challenges facing transitioning youth. In early 2007, the committee made a strategic decision to pause in implementation of the initiative to secure additional partners and identify adequate funding resources to ensure the sustainability and success of the initiative.

A number of meetings with the Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) took place in the late spring and early summer of 2007. Eventually, DCS invited UWCI to submit a proposal that resulted in substantial multi-year support for the Connected by 25 Project. In September 2007, UWCI convened a time-limited taskforce, working on behalf of the full Steering Committee, to update and make any needed revisions to the previous project plans.

In June 2008, Connected by 25's Project Director was hired, followed by two program coordinators in September 2008. Implementation of Indiana Connected by 25 began in November 2008, with the first direct services being delivered in February 2009. Indiana also became a JCYOI co-investment site in early 2009. Despite the extended planning period, a diverse and committed set of stakeholders remained highly supportive of the implementation

of Connected by 25—a strong testament to the high priority stakeholders place on this initiative and the strength and cohesion of community planning efforts. Indiana is the newest site to move into implementation.

### CORE STRATEGIES

Indiana Connected by 25 has identified four cornerstones of effective supports for youth transitioning from foster care:

- Coordination among various youth serving systems and programs—education, employment and training, housing, physical and mental health;
- An advocate, mentor, or coach for each youth;
- Youth-centered planning and youth engagement through a Youth Board; and
- Accessible transportation.

With that foundation in place, Indiana Connected by 25 seeks to provide supports and connections across the following seven critical areas:

- Education,
- Employment,
- Housing,
- Physical and Mental Health,
- Financial Competency/Increased Opportunities,
- Personal and Family Connections, and
- Community Connections and Engagement.

To date, implementation activities have included:

- The **Educational Success Program (ESP)**, which provides supports to increase the number of youth in foster care that graduate from high school and achieve their highest potential for academic success.
- A contract with the Indianapolis Private Industry Council, which secured forty **Youth Employment Services (YES)** slots for youth ages 18–25 transitioning from foster care. YES includes access to job readiness training, job retention support, and GED classes.

- A **permanent supportive housing project** for 30 transitioning youth, which will be built in partnership with a private developer interested in creating safe, affordable housing for transitioning youth.
- The **Opportunity Passport™** which includes a personal debit account to be used to pay for short-term expenses, an Individual Development Account (IDA), to be used for specific assets, and Door Openers that create opportunities for youth in foster care to thrive.

### FUNDING

Supporters of Indiana Connected by 25 have worked closely together as the initiative has moved from the planning to the implementation stage. While the initiative's exact budget continues to evolve, supporters of Indiana Connected by 25 include:

- The **Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation** provides core funding for the initiative, including funding staff positions.
- The **Indiana Department of Child Services** also provides core funding for the initiative, including funding staff positions.
- **Lumina Foundation for Education** supports the Educational Success Program.
- The **Indianapolis Private Industry Council** provides support to seed Individual Development Accounts (IDA's).
- The **Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative** provides tools, evaluation and technical assistance, including funding the **Opportunity Passport™**.
- The **Annie E. Casey Foundation** is contributing technical assistance and evaluation resources.
- **Casey Family Programs** provides evaluation support.

### INITIATIVE STRUCTURE

The project director, two coordinators, and a project associate are employed by and housed at UWCI. One coordinator focuses on employment,

education, and coordinating the youth board. The other coordinator focuses on financial literacy and mentoring. The responsibilities for the other outcome areas are shared. The initial plan of Indiana Connected by 25 was to collocate in a specialized transitioning youth unit planned for development at DCS, however the specialized unit was not ultimately established at DCS, so initiative staff remain located at UWCI.

The Indiana Connected by 25 community partnership board serves as the project steering committee. Sixteen senior managers representing each outcome area make up the community partnership board. The Ready-to-Learn Ready-to-Earn committee at UWCI serves as the initiative's governing board. For the most part, the project director is

charged with directing the initiative, and the project director's supervisor at UWCI serves as a liaison with senior management. Day-to-day decisions about the initiative are made by management and staff with input from the community-partnership board and youth leadership board.

*For More Information on the Indiana Connected by 25 Initiative contact: Sam Criss, Director, Connected by 25, United Way of Central Indiana, 317-921-1258, sam.criss@uwci.org*



# RESOURCES

## ***Finance Project Publications Developed with Support from The Foster Care Work Group***

The Foster Care Work Group. *Connected by 25: A Plan for Investing in Successful Futures for Foster Youth*. Washington, D.C.: The Finance Project, March 2004. Available at: <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/fostercarefinal1.pdf>.

Anuszkiewicz, Brittany. *Financing Workforce Development Programs for Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care*. Washington, D.C.: The Finance Project, April 2007. Available at: [http://76.12.61.196/publications/Workforce\\_SB.pdf](http://76.12.61.196/publications/Workforce_SB.pdf).

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Torrice, Roxana, and Soumya Bhat. *Financing Housing Supports for Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care*. Washington, D.C.: The Finance Project, May 2009. Available at: <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/FinancingHousingSupport.pdf>.

### **Resources from the Connected by 25 Demonstration Sites**

#### **CALIFORNIA CONNECTED BY 25 INITIATIVE**

State Initiative Website:

<http://www.f2f.ca.gov/California25.htm>.

#### **PUBLICATIONS FROM THE CC25I SYSTEMS CHANGE ASSESSMENT TEAM**

CC25I Systems Change Assessment Team. *California Connected by 25: An Introduction to the Initiative*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California–Berkeley, Center for Child and Youth Policy, October 2007. Available at: [http://www.f2f.ca.gov/res/CC25IIntro\\_Report.pdf](http://www.f2f.ca.gov/res/CC25IIntro_Report.pdf).

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#### **FLORIDA CONNECTED BY 25**

State Initiative Website:

<http://www.Connectedby25.org>

#### **INDIANA CONNECTED BY 25**

County Initiative Website:

<http://www.uwci.org/index.asp?p=194>



