

AT-A-GLANCE

Initiative Start Date:
 2009

Area Served:
 Arizona, California, Indiana



Initiative Location:
 Oakland, CA

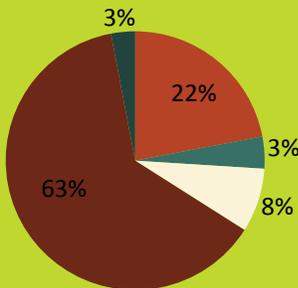
Initiative Budget:
 \$2.1 million

Age Range of Youth:
 5 – 21 years old

Number of Youth Served:
 2,502

Diversity of Youth Served:

- Black/African American
- Latino/Hispanic
- Native American/Indian
- White/Caucasian
- Other/Unknown



ABOUT

FosterEd, an initiative of the National Center for Youth Law, is dedicated to improving the educational outcomes of children and youth in foster care. Research shows that youth in foster care have higher rates of absenteeism, disciplinary referrals and below grade performance and are twice as likely to be held back or drop out. Research also demonstrates a strong correlation between adult involvement and educational success. A major goal of FosterEd is to ensure that each foster child has an *educational champion* strengthened by an education team. An educational champion, typically a parent or other family member, helps communicate effectively with school staff, navigate the school system and facilitate learning at home. In addition to its direct work with families, FosterEd collaborates with select states, partnering with their child welfare agencies, school systems and the judiciary to advocate for improved policies, practices and infrastructure that promote educational success of all children and youth in the foster care system.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- **Educational Champions and Teams** – identify, train and support caring adults, designated by the court as youth’s educational champion; build teams to set and work toward individualized goals.
- **State Reform** – assess suitability and readiness in a state; convene state level leadership team that identifies challenges and opportunities to improve policy and infrastructure; select and operate a pilot project; plan for statewide spread.
- **Resources** – make available a range of practical tools, publications, guides, tip sheets, training and case management systems for champions and state and local systems.

HIGHLIGHT

FosterEd’s state leadership teams have spearheaded a number of important system-wide changes to help youth in foster care. For example, Arizona created new judicial forms and court orders for appointing educational champions and made improvements to its state child welfare case management system. New legislation in California made it the first state to hold schools and districts accountable for achievement by youth in foster care, including requiring that schools be informed about which students are in foster care on a weekly basis. In 2012, FosterEd CA led the successful effort to preserve CA’s Foster Youth Services, a \$15-million/year program proven to improve the educational outcomes of children and youth in foster care.

Youth Thrive is a research-informed framework developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) that identifies five protective and promotive factors for youth (age 11-26):

- Youth Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Adolescent Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence

The goal of Youth Thrive is to increase the likelihood that all youth are supported in ways that advance healthy development and well-being and reduce the impact of negative life experiences. Youth Thrive focuses particularly on vulnerable youth, beginning with those involved in the child welfare system.

CSSP conducted a national search to identify initiatives that provide compelling examples of programs and policy efforts that build the five protective and promotive factors for youth in the child welfare system. This is a profile of one of the 15 selected exemplary initiatives.

BUILDING THE PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

The exemplary initiatives address all or most of the protective and promotive factors. Here are several examples:

Social Connections: By training educational champions and building education teams, youth in foster care receive support and guidance from informed, dependable adults who promote high expectations, monitor their performance and buffer stress. Educational champions support youths' sense of security and encourage them to form closer relationships with school professionals and peers. Building caregiver capacity is a critical component of family reunification and stability.

Concrete Supports in Times of Need: FosterEd helps youth and caregivers understand their rights, navigate the complex education system, advocate for themselves and be resourceful and relentless. FosterEd equips foster children with the resources to succeed in school, a basic necessity everyone deserves.

USING DATA

Central to FosterEd's work is a data-driven system for evaluation and continuous quality improvement. Measures are collected and analyzed in three primary areas: 1) infrastructure 2) process indicators and 3) outcomes. In addition, independent evaluators conduct both quantitative and qualitative evaluation activities within states including: interviews, questionnaires, document review and direct observation. In 2012, the external evaluation of FosterEd Indiana was completed and found that:

- A total of 748 foster children were referred for educational support.
- 1,536 unmet educational needs were identified.
- Of the 275 FosterEd cases that were closed, 75% were closed successfully with all identified educational needs met.
- Implemented new policies and practices requiring social workers to observe foster children in schools and to collect and share critical information with school districts.
- Indiana's Governor approved FosterEd as a statewide program and hired 16 additional staff.