



# “MORE THAN ME”

2015: An Exploratory Study of Pregnant and Parenting Youth in the Foster Care System

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**FIRST PLACE  
FOR YOUTH**  
MORE IS POSSIBLE

WELCOME



## Youth Spotlight – Alicia’s Story

When I first heard about First Place for Youth, I knew that it was an opportunity for my son and me to live a better life. I’d had it rough as a kid; my family was abusive, and I ended up running away at the age of thirteen. When my son was born, that was the moment I realized I wanted more. I wanted him to have the stability and family support I had never had.

Right away, First Place gave me a safe place to live which was a huge relief. Having my own place helped motivate me to focus on my future and be the best mother I can be. They offered parenting classes where I learned so many skills to use with my energetic three-year-old. I had always wanted

to be a nurse, so the staff at First Place helped me find child care so I could enroll at a nursing college.

Now, I’m certified as a Nursing Assistant and working full-time with benefits at a senior care home in my community. **I wouldn’t have accomplished this much without the help of First Place.** The journey has been really tough, but through it all, the First Place staff gave me so much unconditional support.

They are the first people I’ve ever been able to count on to be there for me.

*“I wouldn’t have accomplished this much without the help of First Place.”*

FIRST PLACE  
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THANK YOU

*First Place for Youth would like to thank the Butler Family Fund, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Hedge Funds Care and Kaiser Foundation Hospital Fund for their support of this work.*



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## Executive Summary

In California, approximately 4,000 youth who have grown up in foster care reach the age of adulthood without the adequate resources to thrive independently.<sup>1</sup> These individuals report higher rates of homelessness<sup>2</sup> and incarceration,<sup>3</sup> lower rates of high school completion,<sup>4</sup> and greater unemployment rates<sup>5</sup> than their non-foster youth counterparts.<sup>6</sup>

Foster youth become pregnant and parents at a much higher rate than their non-foster youth peers as well. By age 19, foster youth are more than twice as likely to have experienced at least one pregnancy in comparison to the general population,<sup>7</sup> and the trend holds true at age 21.<sup>8</sup> Foster youth also become parents at more than twice the rate of their peers. By age 19, 23 percent of foster youth reported having at least one child,<sup>9</sup> and that rate increases to more than 50 percent by age 21.<sup>10</sup>

Teen parenthood is particularly challenging for transition age foster youth (18-24), who often lack the essential supports and resources needed to be a parent. Using a longitudinal assessment and key informant interview data, this investigation explored the characteristics and outcomes of parent and non-parent foster youth alumni of First Place for Youth's *My First Place* program.

Questions addressed in this exploratory study included:

- What are the characteristics of parent versus non-parent youth entering the *My First Place* program?
- What types of gains in education and employment outcomes do parent youth achieve while in *My First Place*?
- How do parent participants differ from non-parent participants

in attainment of education and employment outcomes while in the *My First Place* program?

- What lessons can be learned regarding best practices in serving young parents exiting foster care, and what programmatic and policy implications can be drawn from these lessons and the larger findings?

Findings from the study suggest that parents and non-parents entered the *My First Place* program with similar foster care histories, but parents were less likely to be employed or to have received their high school diploma or G.E.D. Differences in G.E.D. and high school completion rates during the program among parents and non-parents did not reach significance. Parents reported higher incomes at both entry and exit than non-parents, and while the mechanisms that account

for these differences remain unclear, being on public assistance did not appear to be a significant factor in explaining the difference. Conversely, non-parents reported higher average earnings from employment relative to parents, although changes in earnings at exit did not differ significantly for these two groups. Results also suggest that the pursuit of post-secondary education and stable employment remains a significant barrier for parents in the program relative to non-parents.

Findings from this study support the call for both policy and practice changes related to serving both parent and non-parent foster care alumni. Primary recommendations include:

1. Improving access to, and the availability of, affordable child care;
2. Extending the service runway for parenting foster youth;
3. Developing a universal pregnancy prevention strategy for foster youth;
4. Providing universal parenting and early childhood services to parenting and pregnant foster youth;
5. Investing in a two-generation approach service model to optimize the benefits to parenting foster youth and their children; and
6. Leveraging additional income resources for parents while they pursue education and employment goals.



# Introduction

In California, approximately 4,000 foster youth each year reach the age of adulthood without adequate resources to thrive independently.<sup>11</sup> These individuals report higher rates of homelessness<sup>12</sup> and incarceration,<sup>13</sup> lower rates of high school completion,<sup>14</sup> and greater unemployment rates<sup>15</sup> than their non-foster youth counterparts.<sup>16</sup> Recognizing the poor outcomes of transition age foster youth, California seized the opportunity to extend foster care from 18 through age 21 in 2010. While a welcome shift, this change requires providers to respond to different challenges and dynamics. One important dynamic of extended foster care is an increase in the number of foster youth who are parents.

Both pregnancy and parenthood rates among foster youth remain well above the national average. By age 19, nearly one-half of foster youth reported having experienced at least one pregnancy in comparison to one-fifth of the general population. The rate increases at age 21, where more than 70 percent of foster youth reported at least one pregnancy compared to 34 percent of the general population.<sup>18</sup>

Foster youth also become parents at more than twice the rate of their peers. By age 19, 23 percent of foster youth reported having at least one child compared to less than 10 percent of the general population of the same age.<sup>19</sup> The rates increase substantially by 21, at which more than half of female and one-third of male foster youth report having at least one child compared to 24 percent of females and 12 percent of

males in the general population.<sup>20</sup> Transition age foster youth who are parents receive limited support and resources. Unstable social, housing, and financial environments affect not only the livelihood of the parent, but also are associated with worse outcomes in health, social well-being, employment and educational attainment for their offspring.<sup>21</sup> Children of parents who had a substantiated childhood maltreatment report are more than twice as likely to be reported as victims of abuse or neglect themselves.<sup>22</sup> The heightened risk of poor intergenerational outcomes demonstrates the need to provide adequate care for teen parents in extended foster care.

California's recent extension of foster care from age 18 to 21 presents the opportunity to confront these bleak outcomes for parent foster youth and their children. It is critical that parenting foster youth build education and employment foundations while in extended foster care to ensure a bright future for themselves and their children.

First Place for Youth seeks to address these disparities for parent foster youth through its service-enriched education, employment and housing program model *My First Place (MFP)*. This study explores the characteristics, experiences and program outcomes for a multi-year cohort of parent and non-parent foster youth who participated in the *My First Place* program to address the following service and policy-related questions:

- What are the characteristics of parent versus non-parent youth entering the *My First Place* program?
- What types of gains in education and employment outcomes do parent youth achieve while in *My First Place*?
- How do parent participants differ from non-parent participants in attainment of education and employment outcomes while in the *My First Place* program?
- What lessons can be learned regarding best practices in serving young parents exiting foster care, and what programmatic and policy implications can be drawn from these lessons and the larger findings?

In order to investigate these questions, historical longitudinal assessment data was analyzed among parents and non-parents who participated in the *My First Place* program. In addition, eight key informant interviews were conducted with female parents who were either current participants or program alumni to provide a richer account of experiences in the *My First Place* program.

By age 19, nearly one-half of foster youth reported having experienced at least one pregnancy in comparison to one-fifth of the general population. The rate increases at age 21, where more than over 70 percent of foster youth reported at least one pregnancy compared to 34 percent of the general population.

# First Place for Youth and the *My First Place* Program Model

First Place for Youth was founded in 1998 to equip foster youth with the skills necessary to successfully transition into self-sufficient adulthood. *My First Place* is the organization's flagship program that provides safe, stable housing, intensive case management and individualized education and employment services for current and former foster youth. *My First Place* staff use intensive case management categorized by low staff-to-participant ratios, outreach and services delivered to the participant in his or her community to provide

youth with practical assistance in areas such as education, employment, life skills development and self-advocacy. During their time in program, participants are assigned a First Place Staff who assists with life skills that support independence and success in program and an Employment and Education Specialist (EES) who helps young people achieve their specific employment and education goals. *My First Place* embraces a positive youth development approach, including an emphasis on strength-based, youth-driven services that reflect

the principles of self-sufficiency and accountability.

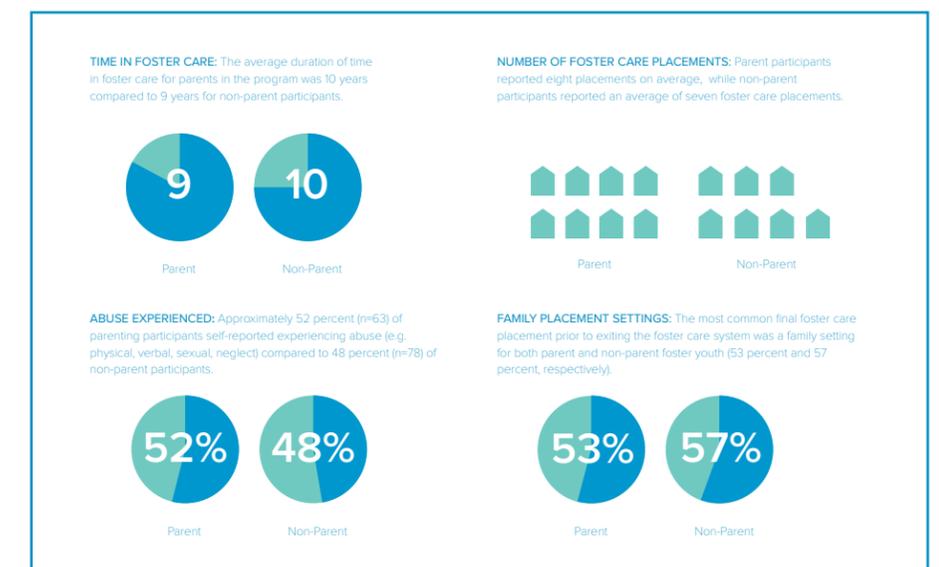
First Place for Youth operates the *My First Place* program in California's San Francisco, Los Angeles, Alameda, Contra Costa and Solano counties. In 2014, across all of its foster youth-focused programs, First Place served 2,300 total youth with a budget of \$12.3 million and a staff of 70. The agency's revenue is derived from government contracts, foundation grants, and corporate and individual donations.

## Characteristics of Youth in the *My First Place* Program

Female program participants (n=285) who entered *My First Place* between July 2008 and October 2013 were included in the sample for analysis of historical assessment data. Due to the limited sample of male parents (n=4), males (n=169) and non-custodial parents (n=29), these groups of participants were excluded from the analysis. Only female custodial parents (n=128) and non-parents (n=157) were included. Female parents made up nearly half (45 percent) of all females served in the program during this time, and females overall comprised 60 percent of all youth served by *My First Place* in this window. The vast majority (74 percent) of female parents and non-parents self-identified as African-American, and no significant differences by ethnic group were found between parent and non-parent youth. Female non-parents and parents had participated in the *My First Place* program for 15 and 16 months respectively, with no significant differences emerging between the

groups on time spent in program. Experiences while in foster care may be associated with greater challenges in achieving self-sufficiency and overall well-being among foster care alumni. These experiences coupled with the demands of early parenthood can create even greater challenges to obtaining independence. We examined

whether there were any differences in foster care histories between parent and non-parent participants. Specifically, we looked at the amount of time in foster care, number of foster care placements, experiences of abuse and final placement setting prior to exiting the foster care system.





• **Time in Foster Care:** The average duration of time in foster care for parents in the program was 10 years compared to nine years for non-parent participants.

• **Number of Foster Care Placements:** Parent participants reported eight placements on average, while non-parent participants reported an average of seven foster care placements.

• **Abuse Experienced:** Approximately 52 percent (n=63) of parent participants self-reported experiencing abuse (e.g. physical, verbal, sexual, neglect) compared to 48 percent (n=78) of non-parent participants.

• **Family Placement Settings:** The most common final foster care placement prior to exiting the foster care system was a family setting for both parent and non-parent foster youth (53 percent and 57 percent, respectively).

Independent samples t-tests and chi-square analyses were conducted to determine whether significant differences emerged between the groups at program entry. The results of these analyses revealed no statistically significant group differences on any of the risk factors assessed above, suggesting that **parents and non-parents entered the My First Place program with similar foster care histories.**

Rates of employment and educational attainment were also explored to determine if differences between parents and non-parents on these key outcomes were present at program entry. Results of chi-square tests revealed that **parent participants were less likely to enter the program with a G.E.D., high school diploma or**

**certificate of completion than non-parent participants** ( $X^2=4.91, p<0.05$ ).

They were also less likely to be employed at entry relative to their non-parent counterparts ( $X^2=10, p<0.01$ ).

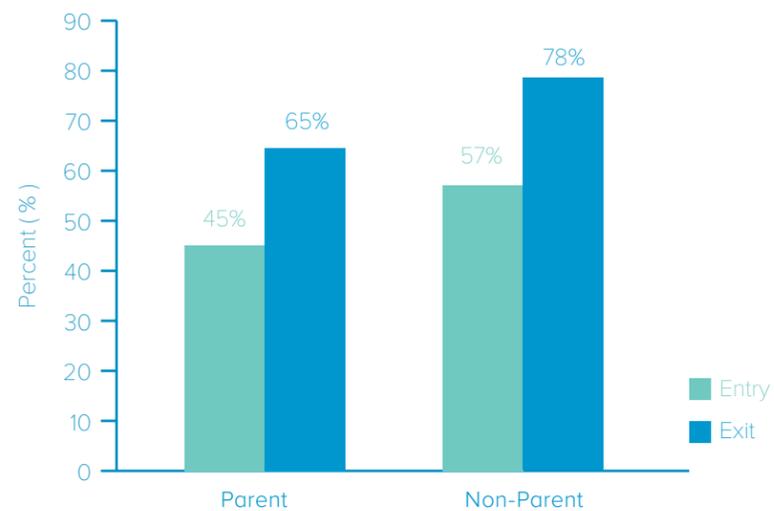
Parents interviewed for this study were asked why they sought services with the My First Place program. Seven of the eight parents reported that the need for stable housing was the primary reason they came to First Place. Three of these seven mothers were homeless at the time of referral. One mother described how she entered the program at 18, left the program when she moved to another state, and decided to move back to the area when she became pregnant. Her need for stable housing motivated her to enroll again and succeed in the My First Place program. Another mother – who became pregnant while in the program

– described the bumpy road that brought her to First Place:

*“I was in a group home and they brought up the idea of transitional housing because I was almost 18. I had no clue what I was going to do afterwards. It was a rough time for me so I had to find what I was going to do when I left the group home. I stayed with my grandfather and then came to First Place...I had to realize I’m doing this not just for me but for my child. It was only me doing this for her.”*

Their stories are not uncommon for youth who enter the My First Place program. Nevertheless, becoming pregnant or actively parenting a child appeared to serve as a significant motivator for half of the mothers interviewed to take advantage of, and make the most of, their experiences in the My First Place program.

**FIGURE 1**  
Parents and Non-Parents with High School Diploma/GED at Program Entry and Exit



## Understanding Impact: Gains in Education and Employment

### HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA AND GED ATTAINMENT

Earning a high school diploma or general education degree (G.E.D.) is an important accomplishment and foundation for independence for transition age foster youth, and one of the key outcomes for the My First Place program. The percentage of parent and non-parent participants who had received their G.E.D. or high school diploma increased from program entry to program exit by 20 and 21 percentage points respectively, with 65 percent of parent participants and 78 percent of non-parent participants leaving the program with their G.E.D. or high school diploma (Figure 1).

Fifty two percent of non-parents who did not have their G.E.D. or high school diploma at program entry obtained it while in the program compared to 37 percent of parents. Additional chi-square analysis was conducted to determine whether these in-program completion rates differed significantly between parents versus non-parents. Results of this analysis suggest that while parents were less likely to have a high school diploma or GED when they entered My First Place than non-parent participants, **rates of G.E.D. and high school diploma attainment while in the program did not differ significantly for parents versus non-parents.**

Three of the interviewed mothers reported secondary education attainment as an accomplishment in the program. Two of these mothers reported that they participated in GED programs while in the program. Another mother provided an example of how enhanced motivation and accountability helped her to optimize the services offered and obtain her high school diploma. When asked about her greatest

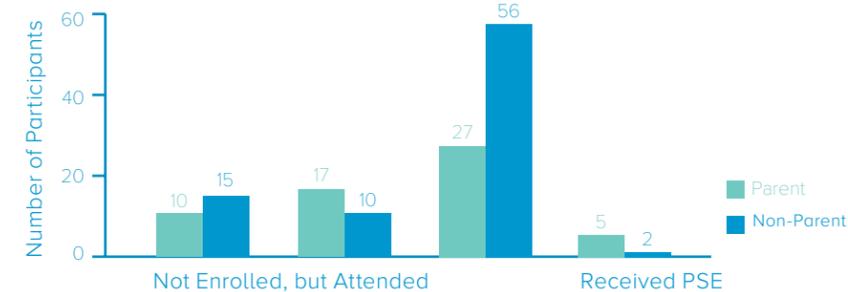
accomplishment in the program, she stated:

*“...I was seven, eight months pregnant when I got my high school diploma. That was an achievement. My mom does not have her diploma and my father didn’t finish elementary school. I was very proud of myself because it was like my parents didn’t do it but I did, which made my sister go and get her GED. I was trying to be a role model [for all] of them.”*

### PURSUIT OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

First Place also encourages participants with a high school diploma to pursue post-secondary education (PSE) to gain the skills and training necessary to earn a sustainable income.

**FIGURE 2**  
Pursuit of Post-Secondary Education While in My First Place



As demonstrated in Figure 2, more non-parents attended PSE while in the program than parents, and this difference was statistically significant ( $X^2(1)= 5.36, p<0.05$ ). But at program exit, **parents and non-parents did not differ significantly in their PSE status** after controlling for the effect of PSE attainment at program entry and having a high school diploma at baseline. The rate of completion of a PSE degree was very low for both populations (due in part to the two-year time frame during which youth are in the program), and **there was no statistical difference seen between the two groups.**

Two of the interviewed mothers reported that going back to college was one of their greatest accomplishments in program. For one of these mothers, program staff helped successfully facilitate her enrollment in college, but her attendance was variable. Another mother provided the following account of her experience pursuing PSE:

*“I was able to go back to college. This was my third time going back to community college but I was very motivated to do it. I had been working, but something clicked that I wanted something better. Every other time I tried to go to college it was hard...something was bad, because I was doing it on my own so I didn’t know exactly what I was doing. But in the program every step was laid out. My [Employment and Education Specialist] came to school and helped me register, talk to Financial Aid, talk to counselors, fill out the FAFSA, apply for scholarships...”*

The data and experiences described above underscores the significant need for intensive supports for older foster care youth choosing to pursue PSE, and the

potential pay-offs of this support. Both of these parents had enrolled in community college institutions, yet their attendance varied over the semesters due to hectic schedules and resource limitations. Additional supports, most notably access to reliable child care, may be critical in addressing the unique barriers to active participation in post-secondary education for parents.

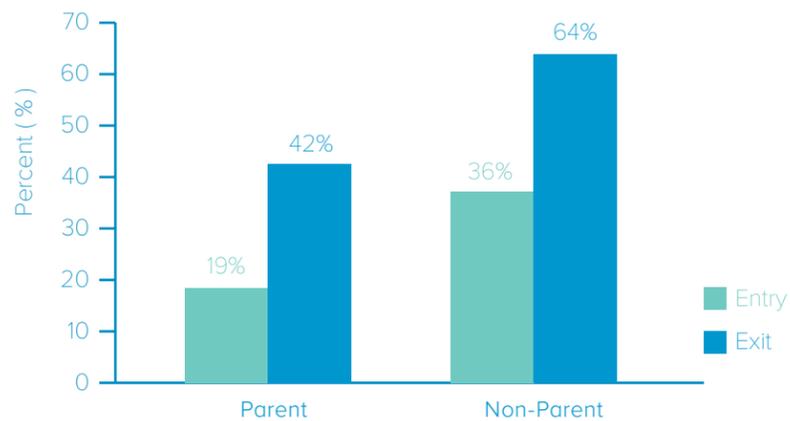
### VOCATIONAL TRAINING OUTCOMES

Participation in vocational education programming was less common for both parents and non-parents at exit than participation in PSE, but there were **no differences in participation or completion of vocational education programming between parents and non-parents.**

Three of the eight mothers interviewed provided examples of how their pursuit of vocational training and certification was a primary goal for their time in the program. One mother had obtained her certificate as a forklift operator in the program, while the other two were finishing certifications in business/logistics and technology, respectively. Two of the three mothers expressed a sense of accomplishment in identifying and moving towards their career goals through the attainment of these industry-recognized certifications.

*“My ultimate goal right now is to become an assistant manager. I’m in my last class for my certificate in business/logistics. After that I’ll need about two more business classes, and my math and English...I have about 50 units. So I was able to accomplish a lot in program.”*

**FIGURE 5**  
Percentage of Parents and Non-Parents Employed at Program Entry and at Exit

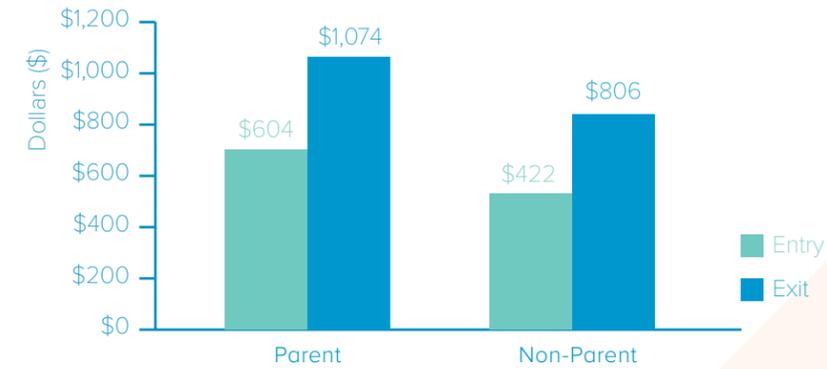


### EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME OUTCOMES

Obtaining and maintaining employment at a livable wage is a requirement for sustainable independence. Job preparation, teaching job readiness skills and placing young people in jobs are all a large focus of the work for Employment and Education Specialists within *My First Place*. **From program entry to exit, rates of employment increased approximately two-fold for both parents and non-parents** (Figure 5). However, as previously noted, parents were significantly less likely to be employed at entry relative to their non-parent counterparts. Moreover, **parents were significantly less likely than non-parents to be employed at exit**, regardless of employment status at program entry ( $X^2(1) = 13.75, p < 0.01$ ). These findings suggest that, in general, participation in the program may not be addressing all of the barriers to seeking and obtaining employment that young parents are facing.

The interviews provided some possible context for why parents were less likely to be employed upon leaving the program. Six of the eight parents interviewed identified lack of access to child care as a major barrier to participating in employment-related activities. Once her daughter was born, one mother reported that she did not have access to affordable child care. First Place connected her with community resources and she eventually secured reliable care with a family member so she could work full time. However, a large percentage of parents in the program do not have access to reliable, adequate child care to allow for employment. For all six of the eight interviewed mothers, coming to the First Place office to participate in

**FIGURE 6**  
Average Total Monthly Income between Parents and Non-Parents

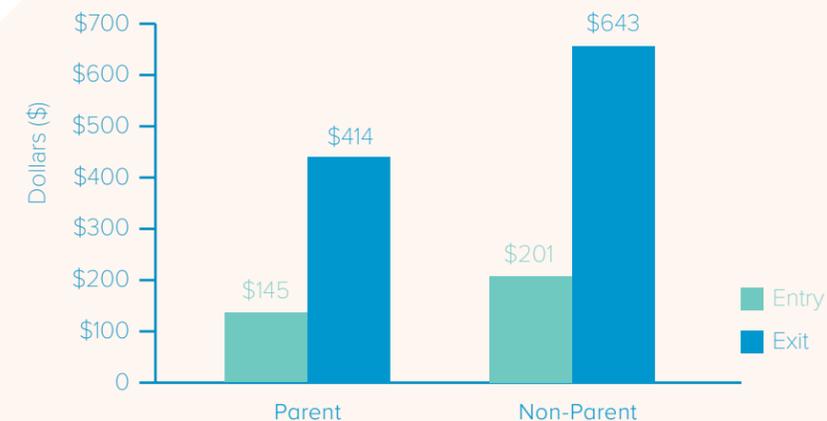


meetings with their Employment and Education Specialists – one purpose of which is to help move youth towards securing employment – was a significant strain due to the demands of parenthood and lack of child care and/or transportation. Moreover, one mother reported that even with child care, attending *My First Place* meetings was difficult if child care was not located nearby.

In the face of these obstacles to participation, flexibility and understanding on the part of program staff was essential to maintaining the engagement of several young mothers.

*“Sometimes I felt that the meetings with the First Place Staff and Employment and Education Specialists were hard when I was a new mom. I was very tired. I had complications making the meetings because I had a new baby, but I only missed two or three of them. They were understanding, but that was probably the hardest thing.”*

**FIGURE 7**  
Average Employment Earnings at Baseline and Exit for Parents and Non-Parents



*“Meeting with my Employment and Education Specialists every week was straining because of my hectic schedule. But they were flexible about it – we could meet over email, phone, text. It was especially difficult when I was taking public transportation. Then once I got a car, it was easier.”*

Increases in monthly income while in the program are important for participants to afford living costs and to build a savings for life after the program. Therefore, differences in income, as well as earnings from employment among parents and non-parents, were examined. For the sake of the current investigation, income was defined as including earnings from employment as well as financial support from public assistance and other sources. From entry to exit, parents on average increased their monthly income by \$470.65, while non-parent participants increased their monthly income by \$383.68 (Figure 6).

Stepwise linear regression was conducted to determine what factors contributed to income at exit, including employment at exit, parenting status and receipt of public assistance.<sup>23</sup> Public assistance included receipt of Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF), Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), food stamps, and other benefits. After controlling for income at program entry, results suggested that being employed at exit was a positive, independent and significant predictor of income at exit, while being a parent and being on public assistance were not significant in predicting income at exit. In other words, neither parenting status, nor receipt of public assistance, contributed to income at exit. These same findings emerged when employment at exit, parenting status

## Lessons Learned About What Works and What Parents Need

and receipt of public assistance were analyzed to investigate their influence on the change in income from program entry to exit. These findings suggest that **being on public assistance did not account for the difference in income for parents and non-parents at exit, nor did it predict change in income from entry to exit.**

Next, differences in *earnings from employment* among parents and non-parents were investigated. Average monthly earnings for parents and non-parents at program entry were \$145 and \$201, respectively. These averages included those who were not employed and had no earnings at program entry. For this same population, average earnings increased to \$414 among parents and to \$643 among non-parents by program exit (Figure 7). Independent sample t-tests revealed no significant differences in the average change in employment earnings from program entry to exit for parents versus non-parents. In addition, although parents made an average of \$229 less than non-parents at exit, employment earnings at exit did not differ significantly for parents versus non-parents.

The differences observed for parents and non-parents in reports of income and employment earnings may be explained by the significantly lower rates of employment for parents versus non-parents at both entry and exit, which impacted the overall average earnings for this group. Nevertheless, change in earnings, as well as employment earnings at exit, did not differ significantly for the two groups. While findings also suggest that public assistance is not a significant factor in predicting income, parents are clearly reporting income that is not supported

by employment earnings alone. While a deeper investigation of sources of income for young parents is beyond the scope of this investigation, further research is recommended to increase general knowledge of financial support for parents that may explain differences in income and employment earnings.

Results from this exploratory investigation of female parents and non-parents provides promising evidence that programs like *My First Place* can have a significant impact on helping parents achieve educational gains at rates that are similar to those of non-parents in program. In addition, while the mechanisms that account for differences in income for parents and non-parents is unclear, there is also support to claim parents who are employed at exit are among the highest earners. The eight mothers interviewed about their experiences provided additional insights regarding several aspects of program implementation that were most valued and critical to their success as parents and independent adults, and what they would change to better address the needs of parents. These insights are described below.

**1. Parenthood and early childhood education classes and support groups.** Four mothers said that the group and ongoing individual instruction they received about parenting was invaluable because it increased their confidence as parents, gave them access to a support network of other mothers like themselves, and imparted important knowledge and skills.

*“During pregnancy, First Place had parenting classes...I learned stuff that prepared me...It really helped. I came*

*in with my eyes closed so it made me feel more secure, like I can do this... Breastfeeding, bottlefeeding, diapering...I am still friends with two of the other moms. We did the parenting class, and afterwards we can be there for each other.”*

Nevertheless, another four mothers stated that they wished they had more access to parenting peers in program through parenting classes or support groups, so that they could learn from and connect with their peers, and feel less alone in their experience as parents in program.

**2. Consistent instrumental and social support from staff to both mother and child during and after exiting program.** Two mothers described the level and quality of support they received from staff during and after program, and the value of that support in helping them feel accepted and encouraged.

*“My First Place was good because it made me have structure; it was never a burden to have my daughter, and they were always welcoming and nice to her. Once I came in, they were very open and fell in love with her...They were very supportive, very, very supportive. They were like my parents, helping me out because I was working, getting my diploma and I had another job to make sure I had enough savings for my daughter.”*

*“...after the program, it was rocky because I didn't have a stable job. My First Place Staff and Employment and Education Specialist were still helping me out. If they didn't have clients at the time, they would call*



*and ask, ‘Do you [need] help filling out job applications, job leads?’ and stuff like that which was very important and helpful. I didn't have that before the program. I didn't have a support system at all. And yeah, they helped me get to where I'm at. They still touch base.”*

Conversely, three mothers felt that they needed more time to adequately prepare for the transition out of the program, particularly as it related to maintaining stable housing. One parent who was on the verge of exiting the program stated:

*“I'm a full-time manager and I still cannot afford to take over my apartment. My apartment is \$1200. This situation could go very badly like I could lose my kid...the only thing that is on my mind right now is no matter what I need to get to work. I don't know what to do.”*

All three mothers recommended that First Place find a way to facilitate continued stability in housing after the program ends or begin transition planning for parents earlier than for non-parents.

**3. Need for access to high-quality child care.** It is unfortunately not surprising that lack of access to consistent, high-quality child care was a major barrier to participation for the majority of parents interviewed. It is suspected that this barrier may in part explain the observed differences in rates of employment at exit for parents and non-parents within the larger sample. One mother stated that participation in the program was “easy” when child care was available and more difficult when it was not. Another mother is working to start her own child care business to fill this critical gap in services to young parents like herself.

*“Right now I am enrolled in school, holding a full time job and trying to start up my own business/non-profit day care for foster youth parents. Not for them, but for their kids... for the foster youth that literally don't have anything so they need help when they are trying to find jobs. I'm trying to be the person they come to, to help them take care of their kids and help them while they are out trying to find work.”*

*“...child care is the biggest thing that us parents need help with, and good providers.”*

**4. Services that help both parent and child.** Four mothers spoke about the value of providing services that benefit and are inclusive of both the parent and the child, and commented that this was either lacking within the *My First Place* program or could be better coordinated.

*“They always have support for child care...and good resources for kids, for clothing and health. [But] the resources could be more... tightly wound...”*

**5. Services to support fathers.** Two mothers discussed how much they wished there were services to help the fathers of their children to be effective parents.

*“He wasn't in the picture but recently came back and wanted to be in the picture. A lot of parenting classes were mainly for mothers but I would have liked some for fathers as well... He just met her last year and she's almost five. So that's one of the things that I am egging him to do, to do a parenting class.”*

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The *My First Place* program provides a service-enriched stable housing model to support parent foster youth attain education and employment success. While parents in the program are making strides, disparities at program entry and exit still exist, particularly in the areas of employment and post-secondary education.

Young parents must dedicate their time and resources not only to their own pursuits, but also to raising their children. Assessment data and program participation experiences presented in this study underscore the critical role that transportation, child care and other services play in helping youth make education and employment gains. With additional demands on their time, attention and efforts, it is expected that parent participants would take longer to achieve outcomes than non-parent participants.

Preliminary evidence from this study suggests that parents come to the program with a longer road ahead of them and may need additional time and support to achieve comparable goals to those of their non-parent peers. The decreased probability of parent participants' achieving the necessary skills for independence within the time frame of extended foster care makes programs such as Transitional Housing Program Plus (THP-Plus) very important. With a longer runway, parent participants may have the same probability of achieving education and employment goals as non-parent participants.

An effective response requires two directed efforts. First, leaders and providers must build out adequate care and services to ensure parent foster youth have the opportunity to succeed in education and employment. Second, leaders and providers across

the system must collectively work to reduce the prevalence of pregnancy and parenthood among foster youth. Based on the findings presented in this study, some specific recommendations to achieve these two goals include:



**1. Improve access to and availability of affordable child care.** Ironically, in our current system, the children of parent foster youth are not given priority access to subsidized child care. However, if those children are removed from their parents' care and placed in foster care themselves, they are given priority access to subsidized care. The lack of affordable and reliable child care restricts a foster youth's ability to achieve education and employment goals while being a responsible parent. It is critical that we find ways to remedy this gap in support.

**2. Extend the service runway for parent foster youth.** The outcomes of *My First Place* parent participants demonstrate that although parents are progressing in education and employment pursuits, they are not able to attain self-sufficiency at the same rate as non-parents. Parent foster youth require additional time to achieve the skills necessary for independence due to the responsibilities involved with parenthood and may need more support to secure stable housing. CA Senate Bill 1252, Public Social Services for Former Foster Youth: Transitional Housing (Torres), gave counties the option to extend Transitional Housing Program-Plus eligibility to age 25 for a total of 36 cumulative months if the former foster youth is completing secondary education or is enrolled in post-secondary education. To date, only a handful of counties have exercised this option. Efforts such as these are needed to ensure young parents have support required after they age out of care to finish school.

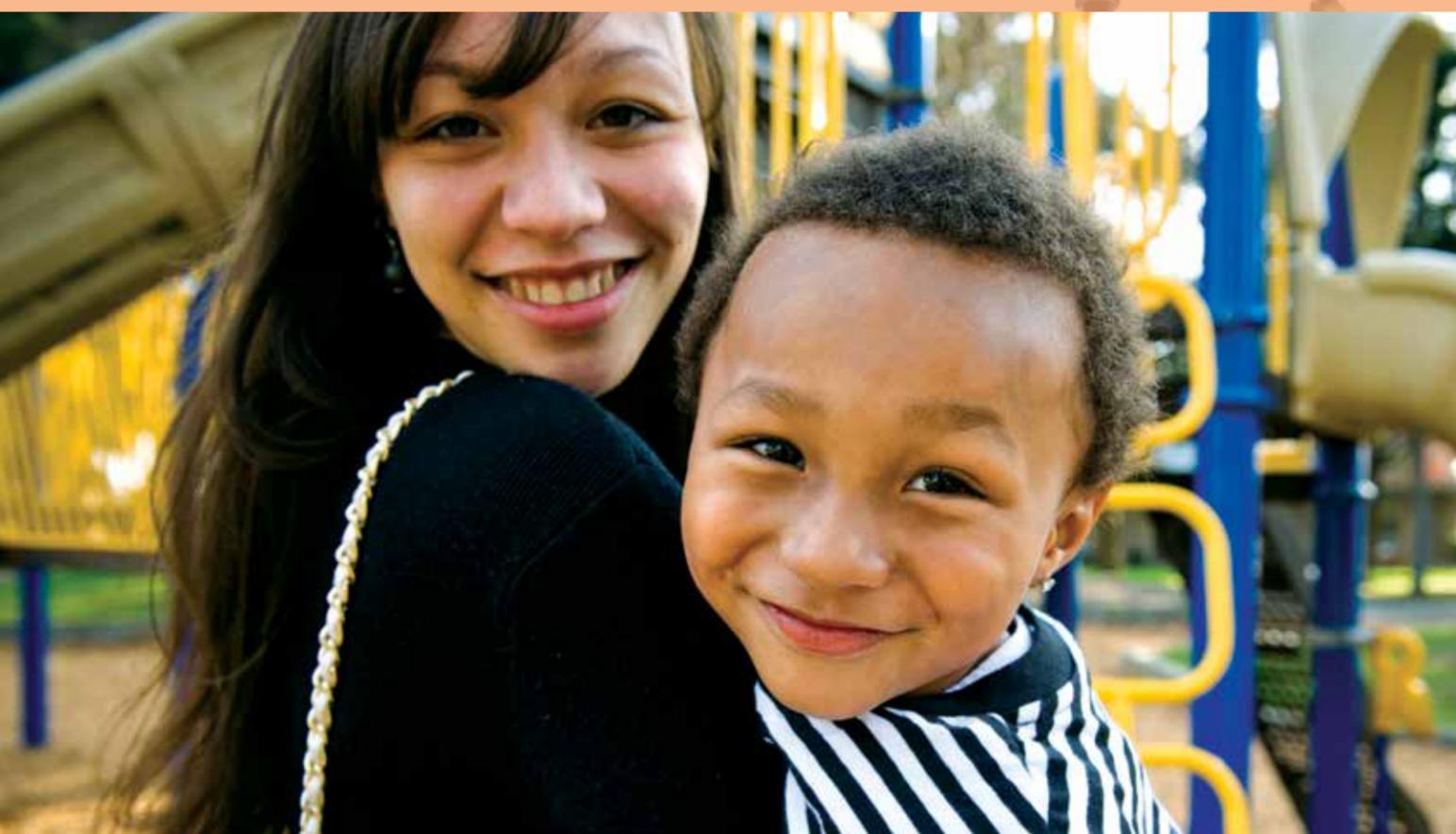
**3. Develop a universal pregnancy prevention strategy for foster youth.** Efforts to decrease pregnancy rates throughout the child welfare system are vital to allow youth to use their time in extended foster care to focus on education and employment pursuits. However, historically there has been little clarity about who retains this responsibility to educate youth about sexual health and pregnancy prevention. Recent legislation in California, CA Senate Bill 528, clarified that a county social worker is authorized to have these educational conversations with youth over the age of 12, but does not require it, so it is still unclear how many youth are actually receiving critical reproductive health information. To help build tools and practices for incorporating youth pregnancy prevention into core child welfare programs for foster youth, the John Burton Foundation has recently launched the "California Foster Youth Pregnancy Prevention Institute" with six initial counties in California. It will be important to track and build on lessons learned from this initiative to strengthen pregnancy prevention efforts across the system.

**4. Provide universal parenthood and early childhood services to parents and pregnant foster youth, including fathers.** Data show that children born to parents with a history of abuse are at much greater risk of experiencing abuse themselves, implying a need for early intervention and support services.<sup>24</sup> As described by the mothers interviewed for this study, parenting classes and support groups were vital in giving them skills and confidence to bond with

and care for their babies and were recommended as a way to connect with and gain support from other young parents in the program. Early and continued parenting education is key for supporting the formation of a healthy family unit and possibly stemming future child welfare involvement.

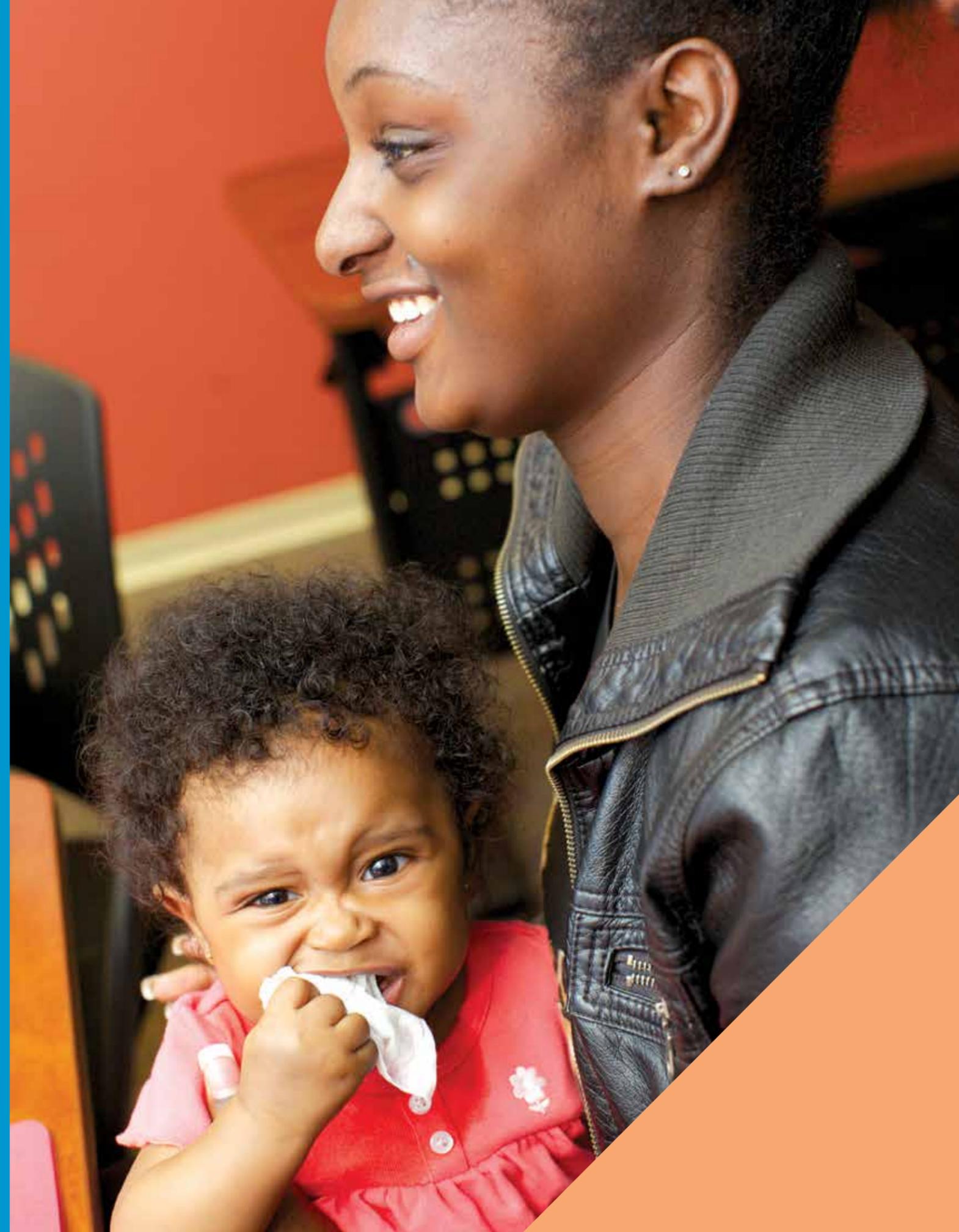
**5. Invest in a two-generation approach service model to optimize the benefits to foster youth parents and their children.** Research shows that there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between a parent's education, economic stability and overall health and their child's success. At the same time, the child's education and development needs are powerful motivators for parents. Investing in a whole-family or two-generation approach helps young parents pivot from the legacy of trauma to build their personal assets while supporting the healthy development of their children – the best chance of putting a family on the path toward success.

**6. Leverage additional income resources for parents while they pursue education and employment goals.** Parent participants need to leverage additional resources, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Women, Infants and Children (WIC), to maintain income stability while progressing towards education and employment goals.



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- <sup>2</sup> 45 percent homeless (See 1, Supporting Transition-Age Foster Youth)
- <sup>3</sup> 25-35 percent in California (1) compared to 0.271 percent on average in California
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- <sup>12</sup> 45 percent homeless (See 12, Supporting Transition-Age Foster Youth)
- <sup>13</sup> 25-35 percent in foster youth in California (12) compared to 0.27 percent on average in general California population
- <sup>14</sup> 50 percent graduation rate for foster youth (12) compared to 79 percent nationally. National Center for Education Statistics (2012). Retrieved from: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014391.pdf>
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- <sup>23</sup> See Appendix A for calculations.
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