



Time to Expect More

FIRST PLACE FOR YOUTH • 2014–2018 STRATEGIC PLAN



Since 1998, First Place for Youth has proven that, with the right leadership and support, transition-age foster youth can defy the odds.

We've found that the more we expect from young people and ourselves, the more we achieve together.


Time for Firsts

The years between the ages of 18 and 24 can be both exhilarating and terrifying for any young person. It's a critical period filled with many "firsts": First time working a full-time job. First time managing your own time and money. First time in college. First time living in your own apartment. But for the 26,000 young people nationwide transitioning out of foster care without the support of parents or family networks, these firsts on the journey to adulthood are much more perilous and uncertain.

Without housing, education or support from caring adults:

- **35% of former foster youth experience homelessness;**
- **20% will be arrested or incarcerated;**
- **54% will drop out from high school; and**
- **99% will never graduate from college.**





"When I aged out, I felt a loss of control. I couldn't depend on anyone but myself. Now that I have the opportunity to be stable, I can really start my life."

—LOLA

Time for Change

To address these challenges, First Place for Youth successfully advocated for national legislation, the Fostering Connections to Success Act, which extends unprecedented public funding support for foster care youth up to the age of 21 in some states, including California.

Just as transition-age foster youth are joining the adult world for the first time, professionals in the foster care field are charting new territory as well. These legislative milestones signal an important cultural shift within the foster care field: **The focus is evolving from keeping kids safe to preparing youth for the challenges and opportunities of adulthood.**

"School means so much to me and finishing is my goal. I always knew I could achieve my goal, but I had no stable place to stay so I was worried. Without First Place I'd still be trying to finish college while homeless."

—POETIC

Time for Leadership

Since 1998, First Place has proven that, with the right leadership and support, transition-age foster youth can defy the odds. We take a "double bottom line" approach to our work: Provide results-driven direct service to young people and change public policies that will improve the lives of as many youth as possible.

We have helped fundamentally reshape the landscape for transition-age foster youth in California, starting with creation of the state housing program in 2001, which helps youth who "age out" of foster care at age 18 live on their own by providing 24 months of affordable housing and supportive services. More recently, First Place was instrumental in advocating for more robust services to youth through their 21st birthday.

Today, First Place is one of California's largest and leading providers for transition-age foster youth because of our years of on-the-ground experience. We have programs in five California counties—Alameda, Contra Costa, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Solano.

First Place for Youth has the experience and track record to help lead the way.

My First Place has the potential to be a national model for helping foster youth transition to adulthood.

My First Place: A Promising Model

“Having a safe place to live gave me the opportunity to concentrate on working and putting a plan together for my future.”

—BOBBY LEE

For the past five years, First Place has focused on refining and expanding our flagship program, My First Place. One of the first of its kind in California, My First Place helps young people achieve critical milestones on the path to adulthood by coupling stable housing with intensive guidance in employment, education and healthy living.

This program, which expanded to Los Angeles in 2010, now houses more than 350 youth, ages 18–24, annually. Over the life of our five-year strategic plan, My First Place will grow to house 10 percent of the foster youth in need of services—a total of 1,215 young people—in California. Our two pipeline programs, First Steps and the Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP), will serve an additional 2,000 people each year.

Core Elements

1. Pre-Housing Prep

Over the course of two weeks, youth take part in a program orientation which includes in-depth, one-on-one meetings to discuss healthy living, employment, education and housing.

2. Place to Call Home

Two youth are paired to live in a two-bedroom apartment and get assistance at move-in with groceries and furniture. Youth who are pregnant or parenting move into their own one-bedroom apartment. At the end of their time in the program, youth may take over the lease.

3. Personalized Support

Each participant is assigned a team that provides wraparound support: A Youth Advocate acts as a case manager, meeting with youth weekly to provide emotional support and skills training so they can live independently. Employment and Education Specialists meet with youth bi-weekly to develop an Action Plan and support youth in obtaining and maintaining employment, finishing high school and enrolling in college.

“Had I not found First Place, I don’t know where I would be. My time here has been like taking that next step into adulthood.”

—CHRIS

Strong Outcomes

Youth who completed the My First Place housing program in fiscal year 2012 demonstrated the following successes:

90% lived in stable housing

92% attended post-secondary school

81% were employed

99% retained custody of their children



LONG-TERM VISION

All foster youth in the United States can make a successful transition to adulthood by achieving self-sufficiency so that the disparities between these youth and their non-foster care peers are eliminated.

First Place is a national leader in building the evidence to support this drive and in increasing awareness, changing perceptions and building a movement to make it happen.

Time to Seize Opportunity

Over the next five years, First Place aims to make significant strides toward our long-term vision: All foster youth have the support and resources to successfully transition to adulthood. Our strategic plan is anchored by three interconnected objectives:

Expand What Works

Influence the foster care field and other stakeholders to adopt policies and practices that will help transition-age foster youth succeed.

Make the Case

Continue to build evidence that My First Place achieves measurable outcomes for youth.

Sustain Success

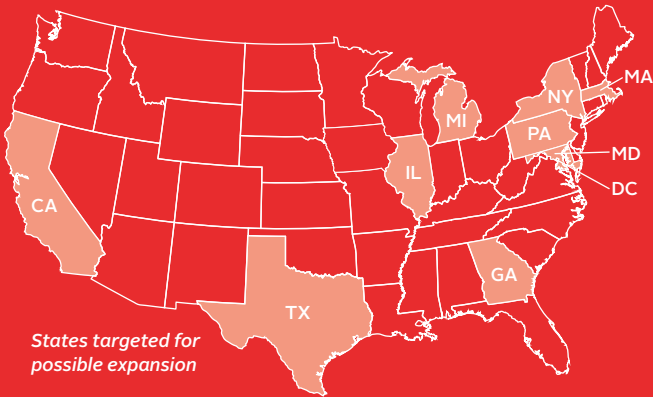
Build on the new funding stream we helped secure by raising funds to meet current program goals and enable growth.

OBJECTIVE 1

Expand What Works

GOAL

Scale the My First Place model to fundamentally change the way the child welfare system serves older foster youth.



KEY ACTION STEPS

- ✓ Expand My First Place within California and beyond:
 - Grow our existing model to nearly double the number of young people housed to 1,215 over the life of the plan and expand the model to one new county in California.
 - Test My First Place outside of California in two locations where expansion is both feasible and sustainable based on strength of local champions and funding environment.

- ✓ Engage in limited, targeted advocacy to lay the groundwork for more sustained advocacy in 5–10 years:
 - Influence funding policies, including child welfare finance reform and performance-based contracting.
 - Continue to collaborate with national coalitions to share knowledge and resources.
 - Become a trusted resource and ally for key state and federal policymakers.



OBJECTIVE 2

Make the Case

GOAL

Establish My First Place as an evidence-based intervention preferred by experts in the field as well as by public and private funders.

KEY ACTION STEPS

- ✓ Build a greater level of evidence for My First Place, using the 2012 formative evaluation as a springboard to further test the model's effectiveness when accounting for additional factors.
- ✓ Pursue a rigorous evaluation to demonstrate differential outcomes for youth in a limited number of sites in California.
- ✓ Share successful principles for working with youth with other practitioners to improve field-wide practices.



Interact with the 2012 formative evaluation online at
MyFirstPlace.FirstPlaceForYouth.org

OBJECTIVE 3

Sustain Success

GOAL

Be financially healthy so First Place for Youth can continue to serve young people with the highest quality service.

KEY ACTION STEPS

- ✓ Identify and secure a funding mix of 80% in public funding and 20% in private funding.
- ✓ Scale our programs and strengthen our infrastructure so we can serve more youth more efficiently.
- ✓ Use annual surpluses to build our reserves and reinvest in success.

"First Place really went all out for me. My next goal is to get my degree. And I know I can achieve that goal."

—DONALD

"When you're not worried about housing, you can do things that you never thought you could do before, like go to college and get a good job."

—MALCOLM

Time to Build Staying Power

Guiding foster youth on their journey to adulthood is about building staying power. First Place's results-driven culture will ensure foster youth get the opportunity they deserve to chart their own future.

Malcolm is one of Comcast's top national sales people, an achievement not uncommon for someone with a UC Berkeley degree, a prestigious civic leadership fellowship and a hero award on his resume.

But Malcolm's success is rarely expected from a former foster youth whose father was murdered when he was six. Growing up in a tough Richmond neighborhood, he was removed from his mother's home at 15, was in and out of the juvenile justice system and attended 10 high schools.

Too often, people give up on youth like Malcolm. At First Place, we focused on discovering his potential. His journey wasn't always easy; before college, he never received a grade above a C. "I used to be terrified of college. People told me I wasn't cut out for it, but I knew First Place would help me keep my apartment and I would always have someone to talk to about managing my life," he said.

"I am a product of First Place," says Malcolm. "It's the best thing out there for foster youth."



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First Place for Youth
426 17th Street, Oakland, CA 94612
510.272.0979
www.FirstPlaceForYouth.org
Info@FirstPlaceForYouth.org