FIRST PLACE FOR YOUTH
MORE IS POSSIBLE

STRATEGIC PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

Fiscal Years 2025 to 2031

Table of Contents

THE CHALLENGE.....3
THE OPPORTUNITY.....4
THE APPROACH..... 5
OUR JOURNEY..... 6

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES.....7
GROW + EXPAND..... 8
DEMONSTRATE + INNOVATE..... 10
AMPLIFY + CHANGE..... 11
ENHANCE + BUILD.....12
RAISE + SUSTAIN.....13

LOOKING AHEAD.....15
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... 16

APPENDICES
SITE SELECTION FRAMEWORK.....17
FTE INCREASE.....17
STRATEGY DEFINITIONS..... 18

THE CHALLENGE

FIRST PLACE FOR YOUTH stands poised for transformative growth and impact. Our ambitious five-year roadmap will dramatically expand our reach, doubling the number of youth served through My First Place™ to approximately 1,500 annually. By 2031, we will extend our presence from 6 to 12 states, leveraging both new brick-and- mortar sites and affiliate partnerships. This expansion, coupled with continuous program innovation, will be powered by strategic investments in organizational capacity, evidence-building, youth advocacy, and financial sustainability. With our proven model of comprehensive support in housing, education, employment, and well-being, First Place for Youth is committed to setting more transition-age foster

Each year, 23,000 young people age out of the foster care system nationwide[1], abruptly losing vital financial, educational, and social support. The system is failing our young people and the outcomes are devastating:

- **Up to 46% will experience homelessness by age 26[2]**
- **Up to 25% of former foster youth will be involved with the criminal justice system within two years of transitioning out of child welfare[3]**
- **Only 50% will complete high school on time[4]**
- **Less than 5% will earn a college degree[4]**

1 https://scholarworks.calstate.edu/downloads/2227mx87x
2 https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/RL34499.pdf
3 https://nfyi.org/issues/juvenile-justice/
4 https://nfyi.org/issues/higher-education/

"While homeless and navigating life after the child welfare system, I realized I needed extra support, so I entered the My First Place™ program. Two months before giving birth, I moved into the nicest home I've ever had and I'm raising my son in the kind of community I needed as a child, with support in achieving my life goals. Without programs like First Place for Youth, I believe I would be homeless, without many options. That's the reality for so many people in and out of foster care where I come from. First Place for Youth has supported me in taking steps toward a life that everybody deserves, a life that's safe, where I can thrive, as well as to genuinely say I love myself and my life." – *Liliana*

THE OPPORTUNITY

First Place for Youth's mission is to help foster youth build the skills they need to make a successful transition to self-sufficiency and responsible adulthood. We believe every foster youth deserves to reach their full potential and lead a fulfilling life. Not only do we help young people beat the odds - but we are also focused on changing the odds altogether.

For almost 30 years, our organization has pioneered an innovative, nationally-recognized model called My First Place™ that provides housing, education, employment, and well-being support to transition-age foster youth.

Our holistic approach helps these young people build the skills necessary to lead opportunity-rich, choice-filled lives.

With nearly 200,000 transition-age foster youth aged 18 to 24 across the United States, the need is significant, but solvable.

THE APPROACH

Our approach is changing the narrative for transition-age foster youth. First Place takes a dual approach of delivering exceptional direct services coupled with bold systems change efforts:

- Our **transformative programs** focus on housing, education, employment and well-being and are built on trusting relationships between youth, our expert staff, and systems.

- Our **evidence-informed** model provides a clear pathway to public funding and scalability.

- Our impact **leverages data** to continuously improve services and build evidence that catalyzes the field.

- Our expertise in systems change, stakeholder engagement, and policy work **removes barriers** from the lives of foster youth.

Our **My First Place** model delivers truly transformational outcomes for the foster youth in our program. Our Fiscal Year 2023 data showed that:

- **92%** achieved **stable housing** at exit
- **85%** earned a **high school diploma** or GED
- **78%** attended **post-secondary education**
- **86%** secured **employment**
- **96%** maintained their **family size** (no additional pregnancies)

OUR JOURNEY

BRIDGE PLAN

In our 2020-2022 Bridge Plan, we set out to intentionally shift from a California-based service provider to a national organization that leverages program and policy efforts to affect systems change across the country. In 2023, catalytic support from the Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation jump-started our process to draft a framework for expanding more rapidly that includes a renewed commitment, a disciplined approach, strategic investments, and a resource plan.

This new Strategic Plan leverages the best thinking and lessons learned from our

SEVEN-YEAR STRATEGY OVERVIEW

At First Place for Youth, we believe every foster youth should reach their full potential and lead fulfilling lives. **We are not striving to help young people beat the odds, we are focused on changing the odds.** Our organization has a proven track record of success in California and a moral imperative to use our expertise to extend our impact to as many young people across the country.

In partnership with our many stakeholders, we engineered a seven-year Strategic Plan highlighting our expertise and will to create the conditions for change.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

GROW + EXPAND
Expand our program reach and systems change impact across the nation by growing to 12 states and doubling the number of youth served through our My First Place model.

DEMONSTRATE + INNOVATE
Chart a path that establishes a strong evidence base for the My First Place model.

AMPLIFY + CHANGE
Elevate youth voices and raise our visibility as a national leader of extended foster care.

ENHANCE + BUILD
Strengthen our organizational capacity by investing in our team and identifying strategies to maximize efficiencies in staffing and operations.

RAISE + SUSTAIN
Implement a financial model for the organization that ensures new and existing sites are positioned for long-term, sustainable growth.

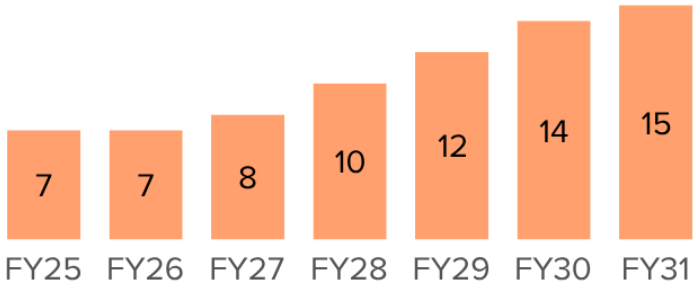
Our plan leverages First Place's 25+ year history in providing direct services and driving changes in extended foster care systems. Over the last three years, First Place has set ourselves up for this additional national expansion. We will continue delivering transformative programs built on trusting relationships with youth while using our data to influence laws, policies, and narratives that create barriers. This dual approach of outstanding direct services and policy advocacy uniquely positions First Place to create lasting change and opportunity for transition-age foster youth

GROW + EXPAND

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

First Place believes that our model and approach to services for transition-age youth achieve outcomes that significantly change the life trajectory of the young people we serve. To that end, we endeavor to serve youth across the U.S. to "level the playing field" for many underserved youth in this population.

We aim to expand our reach and impact by growing our brick-and-mortar sites, as well as affiliate partnerships across new states and regions. We will leverage existing contracts and relationships to double the number of current and former foster youth we serve, expand to areas of high need, explore additional youth populations, and increase our national influence on extended foster care.



Brick + Mortar Sites

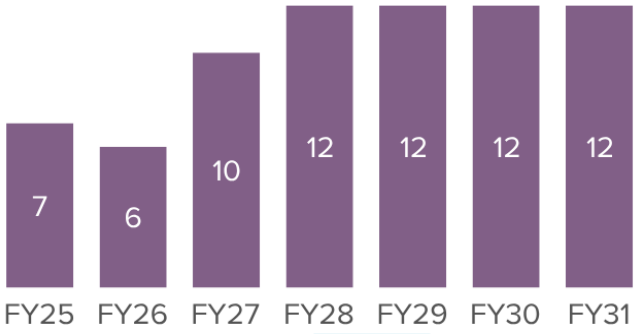
8 New Brick & Mortar Sites by FY31

Brick + Mortar: These are wholly-owned sites with First Place staff operating the My First Place program.

Affiliate Sites

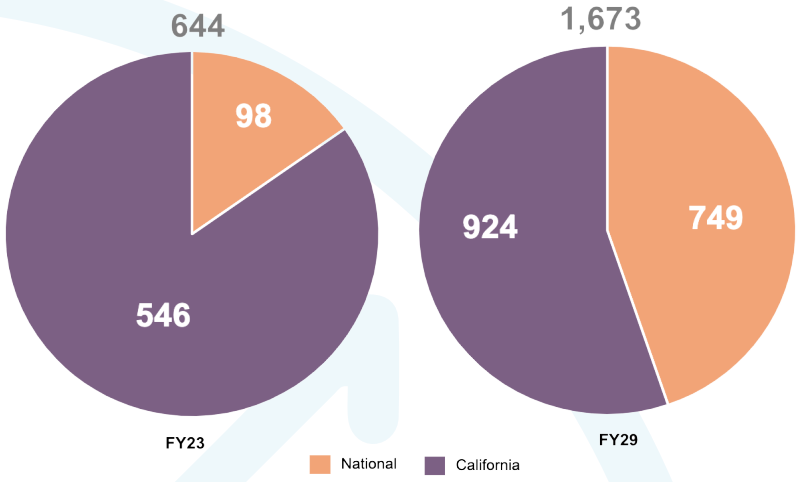
6 New Affiliate Sites by FY31

Affiliate Partnerships: Collaborations established with child Vywelfare agencies and their network of providers to implement the My First Place program. Through these partnerships, we train the agencies and providers on the MFP program model and offer continuous coaching and support to ensure successful launch and implementation.



California Expansion

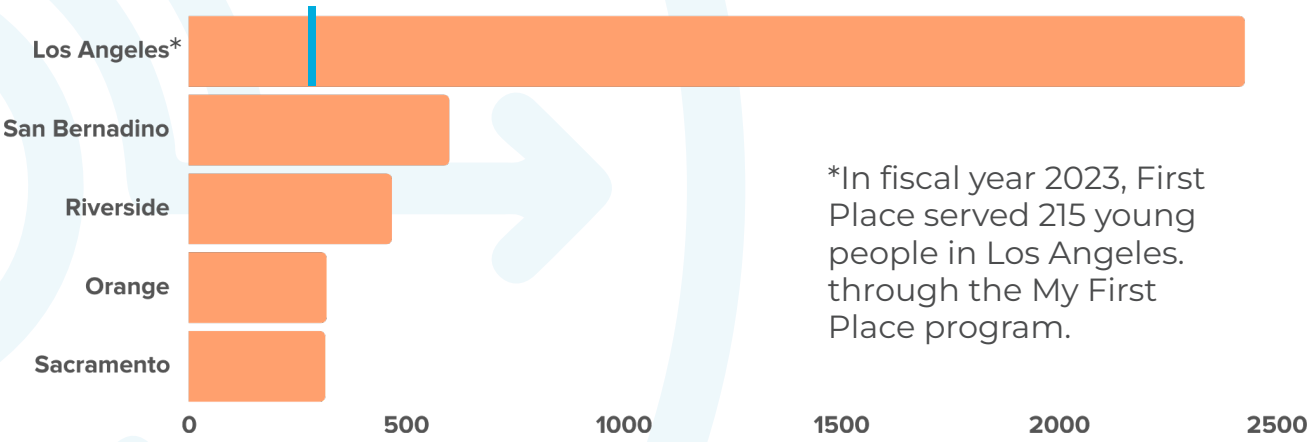
Expand to Meet Immense Need



As of January 2024, there are 2,329 Transition-Age Youth (TAY) in Los Angeles County[1]. There is an incredible need for our services there, and we plan to considerably expand the number of non-minor dependents we're serving by 2031.

[1] According to California Child Welfare Indicators

Unmet Need in Southern California



*In fiscal year 2023, First Place served 215 young people in Los Angeles. through the My First Place program.

Systems Change

Practice + Policy

Practice to Policy: First Place collaborates with child welfare to improve support and outcomes for Transition-Age Youth (TAY). We oversee implementation of the My First Place program, establish governance structures, and use data to guide decision-making and remove systemic barriers.

Policy to Practice: In some states, essential structures for the sustained success of extended foster care programs (EFC) are lacking. These gaps include failure to access or optimize EFC funds, rigid EFC eligibility criteria, and other systemic barriers. First Place's Policy team advocates for change to address these issues.

DEMONSTRATE + INNOVATE

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

As an evidence-informed organization, we are driven by the search to understand what improves the outcomes for current and former foster youth. We seek to fill any knowledge gaps by demonstrating the impact of our programs through rigorous evaluation and research partnerships, while piloting new innovations to increase our young people's success.

First Place is an organization deeply committed to learning and using data to drive results. We are positioned to build evidence of what works across the sector. As we scale, it will be integral to:

- Demonstrate MFP as an evidence-based model, signifying it is having its intended impacts
- Evaluate which components of MFP are most critical to its success
- Increase impact through learning and innovation

Here are the three main priorities and high-level activities:

Learn, Innovate + Celebrate

First Place is evaluating the impact of our Earn and Learn Model and piloting a virtual mental wellness application. We will deepen our understanding of our core education and employment outcomes, as well as our target population and the needs of similar, adjacent populations. Throughout this process, we will celebrate our successes and learnings.

Drive Toward Impact

First Place continues to build evidence of our impact by participating in a three-year federally-funded, longitudinal evaluation measuring youth outcomes. Additionally, leading independent researchers will conduct an impact evaluation of MFP youth using administrative data from two third-party sources, the California Employment Development Department and the National Student Clearinghouse.

Enhance Equity + Quality

Conduct an in-depth equity analysis of My First Place youth and create impactful recommendations to reduce inequities within the program. Revise our fidelity metrics with fresh, meaningful quality measures to ensure we can confidently say the program is being implemented as designed.

AMPLIFY + CHANGE

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Our work amplifies the voices of transition-age youth, ensuring they are heard and valued. We are passionately committed to championing this population, tirelessly working to raise public awareness and advocate for their needs. Together, we can create a brighter future for these young individuals.

Youth Voice

In order to create systems and practices across the country that ensure foster youth lead opportunity-rich and choice-filled lives, youth voices are seen as experts. Youth experiences are valued and used to improve the systems that impact them. Youth voice councils empower young people to build broader communities of support, develop leadership skills, and advocate for themselves and their peers with judges, attorneys, elected officials, and child welfare leaders. We're also committed to defining a framework and deliverables that include Young Adult Leadership Councils focusing on internal program changes and Youth Voice Councils focusing on wider systems change.

Thought Leadership

Over the next five years, we will position First Place as the go-to expert on delivering high-performing, outcomes-driven programs to transition age foster youth, along with policy and advocacy work that increases success by removing barriers and creating opportunities. We will do so by regularly publishing expert opinion editorials, presenting at conferences, authoring reports and publications, and earning media features and mentions to build our national presence.

Content + Media

We will utilize content and media to the national visibility and brand awareness of First Place for Youth. Metrics will include website impressions, external newsletter open and click rates, social

We will craft narratives with integrity, respect, and responsibility, ensuring that the stories we tell honor the experiences of our youth, contribute positively, and avoid exploitation or misrepresentation.

ENHANCE + BUILD

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

We are deeply committed to enhancing our organizational capacity by investing in our talented team, streamlining processes, and building robust systems. These efforts will enable us to expand our impact to more regions. By strengthening our national structure and fostering connected communities within First Place, we will create a solid foundation for growth and support, allowing us to make an even greater

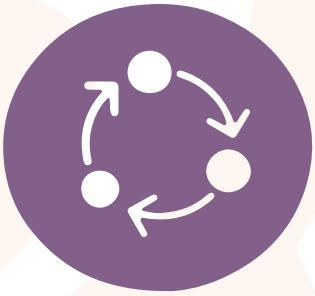
Organizational Culture + Morale

Our staff are the heart and soul of our mission. To truly succeed, we must commit to recruiting and retaining the best people for this vital work. Their dedication and talent are what drive us forward and make our vision a

- Employee Life Cycle
- Career Pathways + Succession Planning
- Embed Values
- Long-Term DEIB Strategy
- Connected Communities Within a National Organization

Structures for Systems + Scaling

First Place also recognizes the need for a solid foundational infrastructure that creates an efficiently run organization that is nimble and adaptable to the anticipated growth over the next five years.



- National Organizational Structure
- Operations
- Policies + Processes
- Streamlined Protocol for New Geographies

RAISE + SUSTAIN

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

To sustain our mission, we will raise funds through diversified revenue streams, including philanthropic, government, and other sources. With ambitious growth aspirations, First Place needs to ensure the decisions we make to advance our work are fiscally responsible to guarantee the continued livelihood of the organization.

Private Funding

First Place needs to raise $65M in order to provide seed money to establish new sites and support the growth of existing ones, hire key national staff, and enact systems change and evidence-building work. Our expansion campaign will seek multi-year commitments from new and existing donors, including individuals, foundations, and corporations.

Government Funding

First Place will continue to advocate for sustainable Transitional Housing Program (THP) rates in California and explore options for higher rate THP beds for high need youth. We will continue to diversify government contracts in California, including state-wide funding and workforce opportunities. We will source government funding for national expansion, including potential federal funding.

Other Revenue Sources

We will explore earned income opportunities to provide technical assistance and training, and establish an affiliate fee structure that includes ongoing licensing fees for the My First Place model.

Housing Efficiency

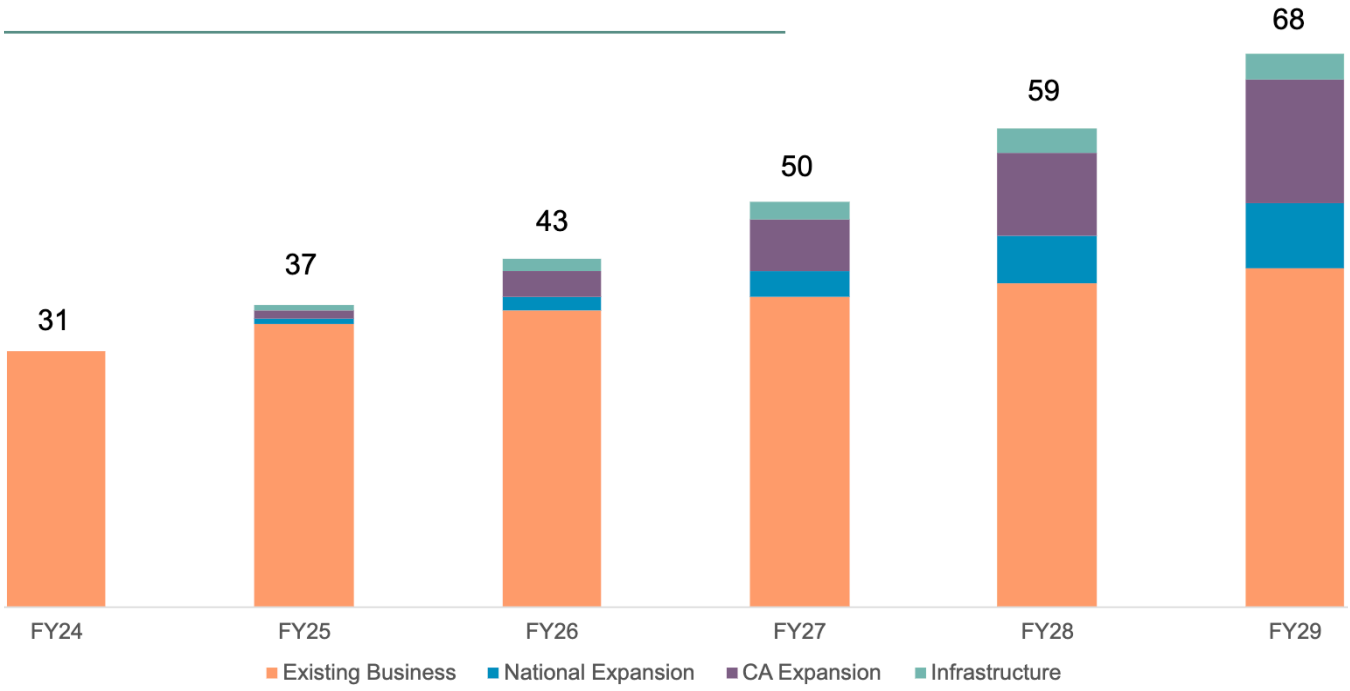
First Place will explore alternative youth housing strategies, including partnerships with affordable housing initiatives, and evaluate property management models and components. We will also assess current staffing ratios and opportunities for efficiencies.

Operations

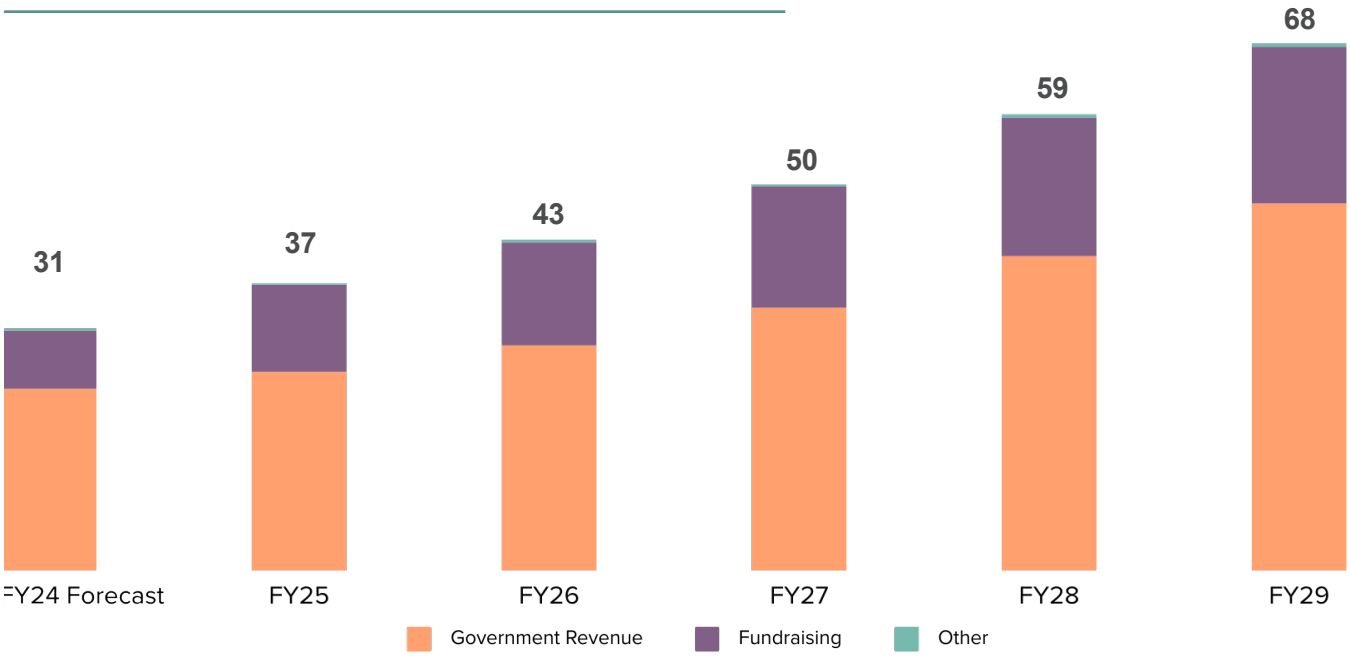
We will identify opportunities to streamline and automate processes across the organization, including in finance, human resources, information technology, and administration.

RESOURCING PLAN

EXPENSES INCREASE FROM $31M IN FY24 to $68M in FY29



FUNDRAISING INCREASES FROM 24% OF REVENUE IN FY24 TO 30% IN FY29



LOOKING AHEAD

Since our founding in 1998, **First Place for Youth has helped over 11,000** older foster youth as they transition into adulthood. One of our alums, Samantha, is a testament to the success of our programs.

"It's been almost 10 years since I left the My First Place™ program, and every time I walk past the office on my way to work, I'm flooded with memories of a time when I faced incredible challenges, as well as those of comfort when realizing all that I've achieved with the support of First Place.

At that time, I was a survivor of domestic abuse and mother to a newborn baby girl. I was looking for stability, a safe place to live, and support, and I found that at First Place.

As part of the My First Place program, I moved into an apartment and enrolled in a conservation and education program, where I like to say that I "failed miserably but achieved amazingly." I learned quickly that the world owed me nothing and that if I wanted anything, I would have to put in the work to find success.

With my First Place team, we set up a plan so that I could continue to get work experience at a local nonprofit and complete my high school diploma. I was able to get an internship at the local housing authority, and I'm still employed there today as an Office Specialist, seven years later!

I'm currently focusing on completing my degree in journalism. I've always known that I wanted to give back to my community and help former foster youth thrive. I want them to know that they're capable and they're worth it. I did a lot for myself, but I would not have had the tools that I have now if it wasn't for a program like First Place for Youth." – *Samantha*

First Place stands poised for transformative growth and impact. Our ambitious five-year roadmap will dramatically expand our reach, doubling the number of youth served through My First Place to approximately 1,500 annually. By 2029, we will extend our presence from 7 to 14 states, leveraging both new brick-and-mortar sites and affiliate partnerships. This expansion, coupled with continuous program innovation, will be powered by strategic investments in organizational capacity, evidence-building, youth advocacy, and financial sustainability. With our proven model of comprehensive support in housing, education, employment, and well-being, First Place for Youth is committed to setting more transition-age foster youth on the path to self-sufficiency and success across the nation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The strategic planning process involved months and many hours of collaborative work from several stakeholder groups. We would like to thank everyone for their support in this undertaking.

We are deeply grateful for Howard Ting, Considea Consulting, for his wisdom and guidance.

NATIONAL EXPANSION TASK FORCE MEMBERS
Hilda West (Chair)
Chuck Daggs
Matt Denn
Nancy Heinen
Keith Shultz
Thomas Lee, CEO, First Place for Youth
Michelle Zajac, VP of National Partnerships, First Place
Vicki Whitlock, Chief of Staff, First Place

FIRST PLACE YOUNG ADULT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

FIRST PLACE EXECUTIVE TEAM & STAFF WORK GROUPS

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First Place for Youth is grateful for the support of our new and longtime investors who were integral in the creation of our Strategic Plan, including the Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation and Tipping Point Community.

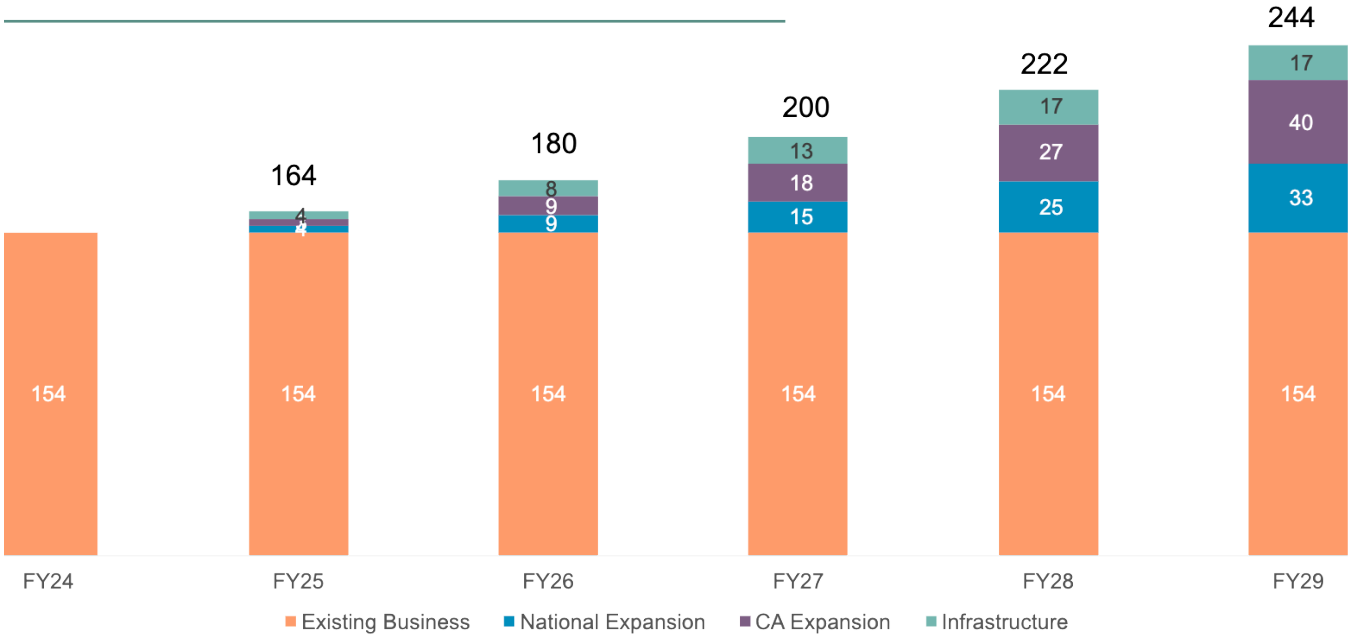
APPENDICES

SITE SELECTION FRAMEWORK

First Place for Youth's Site Selection Framework is a comprehensive tool designed to help identify the most suitable locations for expansion. It evaluates states based on several key categories, each with specific criteria and metrics.

Unmet youth need is assessed by looking at the size and growth rate of the foster youth population and the homelessness rate among transition-age youth. **Foster care system maturity** considers factors like participation in Extended Foster Care (EFC) programs, barriers to EFC utilization, the presence of independent living programs, and overall system quality. **Public funding visibility** examines the state's engagement with EFC and the establishment of rate structures for services. **Private funding visibility** evaluates the amount of private funding available, interest from current and new donors, and the presence of high-net-worth individuals. **Local economy factors** include cost of living, job and educational opportunities, workforce quality, minimum wage, and the business environment's friendliness. Lastly, the framework considers the **appetite for systems change** and the **potential for evidence-building** through proactive outreach and interest in program evaluation efforts. This structured approach ensures that First Place can make informed decisions that maximize our impact on extended foster care systems.

INCREASE FTES BY 90 OR 58% OVER THE 5 YEARS FROM 154 TO 244



STRATEGY DEFINITIONS

SYSTEMS TRANSFORMED – Our goal is to fundamentally evolve the ecosystems that impact foster youth, putting their needs and aspirations at the forefront of design and decision-making.

YOUTH-CENTERED APPROACH – The young person's personal needs, wants, interests, desires, and goals are central to the care and service delivery process. Youth are empowered to make decisions that they believe are in their best interest and allow them to live as their most authentic self.

STRONG OUTCOMES – Our goal is to improve the lives of the youth we serve and set them up to be successful for the rest of their lives. We achieve positive and impactful results in key program areas that are indicators for future success.

FOCUS ON LEARNING – We will exemplify a learning mindset as we continually evolve our services and processes.

LEADING NATIONAL ORGANIZATION – We aspire to have the most innovative and highest impact direct service model for foster youth AND have a national profile that enables us to influence on behalf of foster youth.

DOUBLE THE NUMBER OF YOUTH SERVED THROUGH MY FIRST PLACE – By 2031, First Place for Youth will annually serve ~1,600 young people through the My First Place program.

12 STATES – Our increased presence, growing from 6 states to 12, will reflect geographies where First Place operates brick-and-mortar sites and/or affiliate sites.

TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAMS – We seek to be experts in providing high-impact programming and believe that part of what makes our MFP model highly successful is through offering the full suite of supportive services: housing, education, and employment, to change the life trajectory for young people.

TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS – We act as a trusted partner to young people, staff, our public and private partners, and child welfare agencies throughout the country. We operate from a place of mutual respect and accountability to build successful relationships.

STRATEGY DEFINITIONS

EVIDENCE-INFORMED MODEL – Our model is based on an approach that incorporates the best available evidence from research, evaluation, and practical experience to guide decision-making and program development. We emphasize the use of high-quality, reliable evidence to inform policies, practices, and interventions. We recognize that effective decision-making is based on a combination of scientific research, data, and real-world experiences.

LEVERAGES DATA – First Place harnesses the power of data to make informed decisions, enhance operations, and drive overall success. We believe it is important to view data as a valuable asset and leverage it strategically to advance our mission.

EXPERTISE IN SYSTEMS CHANGE – Part of what makes First Place unique is our skillset and track record of working with public and private partners, child welfare agencies, and policymakers to change existing systems to best serve young people. We use our data and learning to influence the laws and policies that create barriers (or opportunities) for our young people, the flow of resources, the norms and practices reflected in the implementation of official policies, and the narratives and "mental models" that keep a system stuck and prevent our young people from attaining success.

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Telephone

Bay Area 510-272-0979
Los Angeles 213-835-2700

Online

info@firstplaceforyouth.org
www.firstplaceforyouth.org

By Mail

426 17th Street, Suite 100
Oakland, CA 94612