

FOSTER TOGETHER NETWORK 2020

Achieving Responsive and Transformative Impact in Los Angeles



Amidst the whirlwind of 2020, The Foster Together Network (FTN) has been pushed more than ever to live up to its core value of being “simultaneously focused and flexible.”

To say that its members and leadership have risen to the challenges of 2020 is an understatement. We are incredibly grateful for the work of our members and network during this time — each reacting quickly and strategically to the challenges of COVID-19. We are prouder than ever of the relationships and collaborative energy that we have built, as that groundwork helped our systems to react nimbly to unprecedented challenges and to leverage one another’s strengths across sectors and departments.

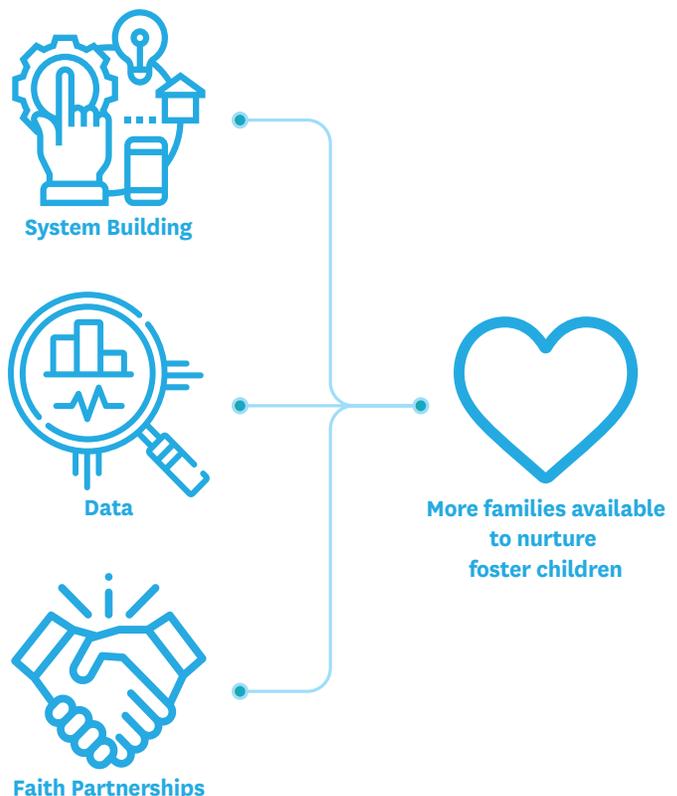
Foster Together Network has held strong to its vision of ensuring quality nurturing for children in out-of-home care via optimal caregiver recruitment, retention and support — at the same time that it has pivoted responsively to focus its energy and resources where most needed under the pandemic. Below are some of the highlights of the fruits of that labor, including member spotlights and transformative network milestones.

2020 has also made clear that the disparities and inequities our community faces are deep rooted and more pervasive than ever. The problems of disproportionality and discrimination have long haunted the child welfare sector. Both the pandemic and [George Floyd’s](#) death have reminded us of how much work we have left to do on those fronts, and FTN is committed to doing our part in this effort.

System Building and Coordinated COVID-19 Response

When COVID-19 hit, FTN’s County and private sector partners responded quickly and with unprecedented collaborative spirit.

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Department of Mental Health (DMH), and Foster Family Agencies (FFAs) communicated closely and consistently to identify and address systemic needs — from policy changes around virtual client contacts to concrete resources like personal protective equipment. Philanthropic leaders responded equally fast, giving grantees the flexibility to focus on crisis response and infusing our system with additional resources to meet crucial needs.





For example, the Pritzker Foster Care Initiative played a pivotal role in increasing access to technology for teens and transition age youth in care, in collaboration with DCFS, Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the Center for Strategic Partnerships, and iFoster. The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, Commission for Children and Families, and Center for Strategic Partnerships successfully increased the supply of PPE for our child welfare workforce, stood up emergency childcare for crisis response workers, and established supply chains for sanitary and other donated goods. These are just a handful of examples of ways in which public and private partners alike stepped up to the challenge.

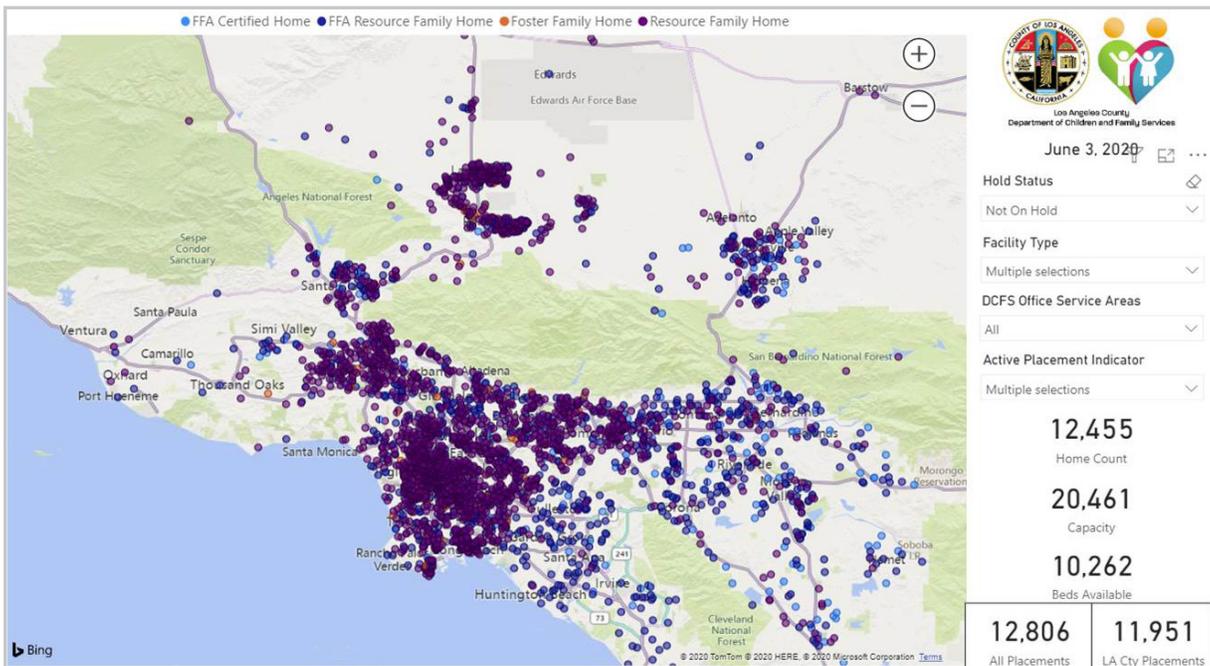
The FTN Cross-sector Workgroup established a COVID-19 Response Strike Team to survey and address the needs of resource parents specifically during this time. The additional challenges of home-schooling, pandemic stress, and potential COVID-related financial challenges were heavy weights on resource parents. The group was concerned both that resource parents be supported in providing quality care for our children amidst these new challenges, and that we ensure they do not translate into a loss of foster families in our system. The group assessed priority needs and then developed resources in response:

- *curated resources to address financial and food security challenges among resource families*
- *distributed resources for self-care, parenting, special needs support and home-schooling under COVID*
- *sourcing and distributing sanitizer to FFAs for their families and reclarifying access to supply donations available to all families through DCFS and Baby2Baby*
- *gaining access to CarePortal for FFAs to access resources donated through faith communities.*

Strike team members UCLA Center for Excellence, Latino Family Institute FFA, Hillside FFA, Commission for Children & Families, 3FN, DCFS, and the FTN backbone team worked together to ensure these resources were made available to all families within our full system of care.

Data: Dashboard Creation

FTN also made progress on key prior initiatives, including creation of a dashboard for analyzing key resource family need, capacity, and retention data.



Thanks to the dedicated skills of DCFS' Business Information Systems ("BIS") team and the thought leadership of FTN Data Workgroup members, a draft web-based Dashboard was developed in early 2020. The value of this new Dashboard is three-fold:

- 1. to provide a centralized, real-time, shared platform for monitoring system-wide child needs and resource parents availability;**
- 2. to deliver a tool for analyzing the data, including zooming in on sub-populations and outcomes; and, most importantly;**
- 3. to guide future strategic investments in recruitment and retention efforts so that our system may optimize our resource families capacity to meet child needs.**

The initial dashboard structure was built and shared with regional DCFS offices in early 2020. DCFS BIS and the FTN Data teams will continue to work to refine it and augment it with additional content and capabilities over the upcoming months (such as COVID-19 or disproportionality related data), with an eye toward eventually making it available to all system stakeholders and integrating its use into ongoing system-wide planning.

Faith Partnerships: Supplying Crucial Community Supports

FTN partners have continued to champion and leverage faith networks as trusted messengers and leaders in addressing community needs.

FTN member Faith Foster Families Network (3FN) has been a model leader in these efforts, especially as COVID-19 posed new challenges for resource families and birth families in the SPA 6 community. 3FN supported 400 resource and birth families in SPA 6 [Operation Love](#) food and diaper delivery events, in partnership with its member churches, the 2nd District, the County of LA, LA Regional Food Bank, Good+Foundation, Kilroy Realty, and Fueling the Fearless. It collaborated with the Commission for Children and Families, CarePortal, and the South LA AAIM Coalition to distribute resources to African-American families in need. It also worked with the LA County Service Integration Branch and Second District to host faith-based community briefing calls with County leadership to share critical COVID response information with the community using faith-based organizations as trusted messengers. This faith-community call model was then replicated in the Antelope Valley in partnership with First 5 LA, Casey Family Programs, and others.

The Commission for Children and Families, DCFS, and FFAs also leveraged CarePortal as part of the COVID-19 Strike Team response to connect supplies provided by faith-based organizations to resource families in need.

Last but not least, DCFS continues to work with its Faith-Based Task Force to develop a Strategic Framework to expand faith-based partnerships system-wide. This plan is anticipated to be released by year end.

Growing Our Influence and Reach

FTN and its members continue to grow their visibility and influence among funders and community partners. In January, the Child Welfare Funders Collaborative featured a panel of Foster Together Network leaders, who shared FTN's story with over 50 funder and public sector colleagues. In May, 3FN hosted TedXCrenshaw Salon, which shined a spotlight on local foster care issues and included a segment on philanthropic foster care financing in foster care with FTN members from The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation and the Center for Strategic Partnerships as speakers. We look forward to seeing our members lifting up the importance of recruitment, retention, and quality care at similar events over the upcoming year.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: FOCAL ACTIVITIES THROUGH 2020 AND BEYOND

System Building: COVID-19 Learning, Virtual Connections, and Pilots

COVID-19 Strike Team activities will continue to address priority issues as pandemic-related needs evolve. Access to technology for foster children under age 16 to use for their education, therapy, and family visitation remains a prominent need. The group is also collaborating with member UCLA Center for Excellence on a follow-up survey to keep a pulse on resource family well-being as our environment continues to shift. Moreover, the Strike Team will take on the application of long-term learning from this crisis throughout our system, including how we can:

- *spread successful new virtual recruitment efficiencies*
- *share technologic advancements*
- *maintain the current deeper appreciation and support of resource parent roles in the educational success of foster children.*



Our Cross-Sector Workgroup partners will also continue to pursue system-wide coordination and quality improvement, by pivoting select content initially envisioned for our Spring 2020 conference (such as implicit bias and self-care for caregivers) into virtual formats. In addition, it will also consider potential pilots to test system improvement concepts, such as new models of practice to reduce displacements and to improve retention among resource families.

Data: Full Dashboard Launch

Fully realizing the value of our data dashboard work will be a priority for the upcoming year, as DCFS and FTN partners refine the content, build out additional system-wide data tracking capacity, share it with key stakeholders, and identify opportunities to apply learning from the data in agency decision-making. The guiding anthem for this work will focus on unlocking its power strategically: *how can we use this and other technology investments to serve children and families better?*

Faith Partnerships: Strategic Framework and Focus Groups

Fall 2020 is anticipated to be a fruitful season for FTN's faith-based efforts. DCFS anticipates the release of its Strategic Framework for faith-based initiatives by year end 2020. This document will provide a foundational guide for expanding partnerships with faith communities throughout LA.

In addition, 3FN will be working with A Second Chance to complete focus groups of faith community members in SPA 6, with sponsorship by the Keck Foundation, Center for Strategic Partnerships, and the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation. This effort will help our system better understand the recruitment and foster care related concerns of families in that region, including a better understanding of the perspectives, motivations and needs of African-American families.