



**BUILDING CHAMPIONS FOR
STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE:**
FosterEd Progress Update



FosterEd | Arizona
Champions for System-Involved Scholars



INTRODUCTION

For youth in foster care, the opportunity to learn is often interrupted by unnecessary home and school moves. Every day, they encounter adults who hold heartbreakingly limited expectations for their future. The various public agencies responsible for their well-being lack the supports and tools to effectively coordinate with each other.

At FosterEd, we witness first-hand the transformation that is possible when young people have champions in their corner supporting their education, and when the adults in each student's life – family members, foster parents, social workers, teachers, counselors, and other supportive adults – are working in coordination and in service of the young person's aspirations for their future. We see, every day, the powerful impact of positive, healthy relationships on a young person's outlook on life, and the hope and optimism that is possible when youth are receiving the support and attention they need and deserve.

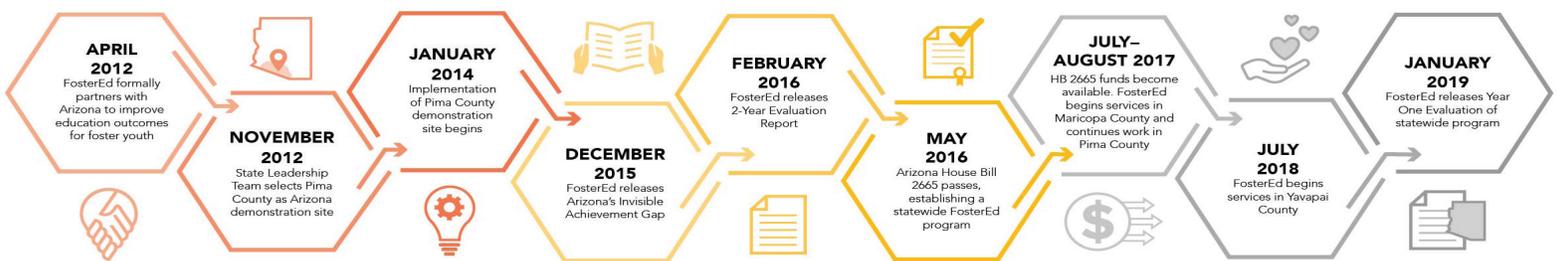
Foster youth interact with many professionals working on their behalf, such as social workers, teachers, community service providers, attorneys, counselors, and mental health practitioners. Often, these adults do not communicate with each other, work at cross-purposes, and in many cases, do not prioritize students’ educational needs. Many of these issues are the result of inadequate information-sharing. Schools are often unaware of which of their students are in foster care, while agencies serving youth operate in silos. Most notably, youth in foster care are largely absent from the tables where decisions are made that directly impact their daily lives. As a result, the plans that are developed rarely reflect their aspirations, strengths, and their own understanding of their educational needs.

The Arizona’s Invisible Achievement Gap report developed by WestEd¹, funded by the Arizona Community Foundation, sheds light on the data substantiating these lived experiences:

- More than 40 percent of students in foster care change schools at least once during the school year, which is nearly four times the rate of young people living in poverty and the general student population.
- Students in foster care were classified with a disability at twice the rate of students living in poverty and the general student population.
- Only 33 percent of twelfth-grade students in foster care graduate, as compared to 70 percent of twelfth-grade students generally.

In response to this sobering data, leaders across Arizona have united to invest in the educational success of their students in foster care. In January 2016, Governor Doug Ducey, together with leadership in the House and Senate, introduced House Bill 2665, which laid out a vision and roadmap to address the needs of these students. The legislation, enacted in May of 2016, established a groundbreaking public-private partnership to expand a model for the education of children in foster care into a statewide program.

TIMELINE



1 Barrat, V. X., Berliner, B., & Felida, N. J. (2015). Arizona’s Invisible Achievement Gap: Education Outcomes of Students in Foster Care in the State’s Public Schools. San Francisco: WestEd.

A VISION TO CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP FOR STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE

FosterEd is creating a future where each and every young person in foster care graduates from high school with a wide array of possibilities for their future. Our vision is for young people in care to be positively engaged in school and learning, empowered to take charge of their educational futures, and sustained by meaningful relationships with caring adults who will consistently and effectively support the young person's educational trajectory once they have exited care.

This work is guided by a framework that all foster youth should have an Education Champion who can support the student's long-term education success, and an Education Team of engaged adults, including the Education Champion, caregivers, teachers, social workers, and the youth, who develop and support an individualized Education Case Plan based on an assessment of the student's educational strengths and needs.

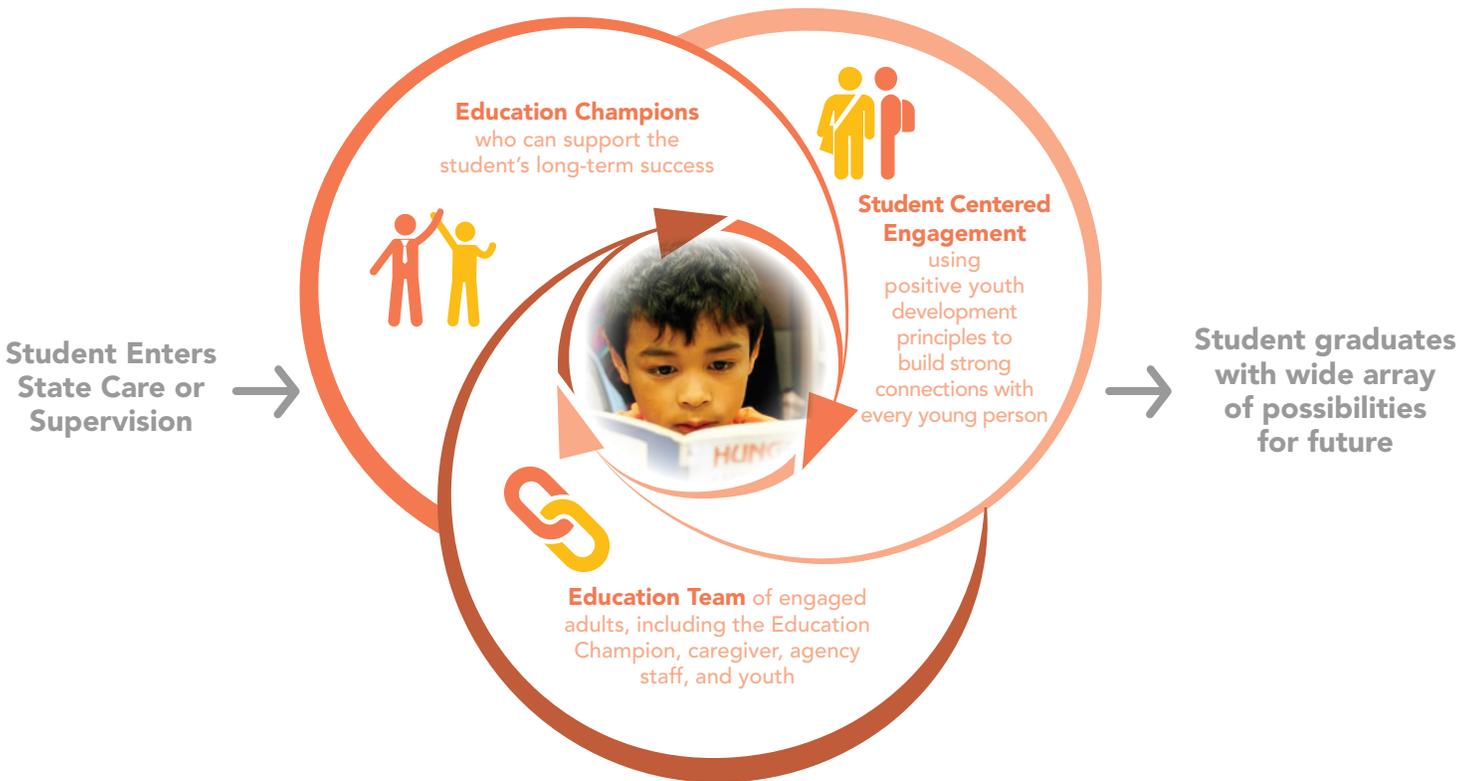
Our practice framework has three components that we believe are key to foster youth educational success:

- **Effective and committed education champions.** Foster youth, like all youth, need strong education advocates who have the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to effectively support the youth's education.
- **Well-coordinated education teams.** System-involved youth are much more likely to succeed in school when the adults involved in their lives—social workers, teachers, therapists, CASAs, and others—coordinate and collaborate to support a student's educational success.
- **Student-centered engagement.** Positive engagement and empowerment at school starts with putting the student at the center of their own education decision-making. Giving students "voice and choice" in shaping every element of their education leads to educational success, particularly for foster youth who have experienced the trauma and loss of control associated with involvement in the child welfare system.

FosterEd tailors its services within this framework to meet students' varying levels of need, and has developed practices to provide both responsive and intensive levels of services. This allows us to serve the maximum number of youth, in a manner that is tailored to their unique needs. Many students in foster care need immediate support around an emergent issue that, if not addressed, can derail their education. For example, we work to ensure that a student can remain in their school of origin after a change in foster placement, advocate

for needed special education services, support a student through a school disciplinary proceeding, or help a student get re-enrolled with appropriate supports after years of haphazard homeschooling. FosterEd responds to these commonly experienced barriers and challenges to get the student back on track, ensure a small issue does not compound over time, and prevent future educational disengagement. FosterEd works to remove these barriers for students through our responsive tier of service. Other students in foster care with a high level of education need—high school students with sizable credit deficiencies, significant behavioral health or special education needs, or histories of disciplinary removals from school—require intensive, relationship-focused supports to succeed in school. FosterEd provides these supports through its intensive tier of service. At all levels of engagement, FosterEd strives to improve collaboration between schools, child welfare, behavioral health and judicial agencies. When these partnerships are strong and youth know that the adults around them are in their corner, they can begin to realize their dreams for the future.

PRACTICE FRAMEWORK



Promoting student empowerment, connections, and engagement

The Power of Education Teams - "Mason's" Story

As told by his education liaison, Jennie Hedges



Sometimes, being an Education Liaison is like being the middle-person between what can feel like a dozen other people who are often not happy with one another. When these adults can come together to support a student in need, so much success is possible.

When I began working with Mason*, his biological parents were at odds with the Department of Child Safety (DCS) and their child's school administration, and each party was finding it difficult to work with one another. When DCS sent FosterEd a referral for Mason, the main challenge was that Mason, a second grader, was having extreme behavioral challenges in school. He was assaulting staff and peers and spending 90% of his day sitting in the principal's office where he felt safest. Mason had a few mental and behavioral health diagnoses, and did not have a special education plan in place at the time I started working with him.

Mason's parents first refused to consent to special education evaluations despite the school's and DCS' requests. When I joined the conversation, I first focused on addressing his parents' concerns. I explained to them what the special education evaluation process looked like, what it meant for their son, what it could lead to, and asked them what their biggest fears were. After learning, listening, conversing about the pros, cons, fears, and concerns they made the decision to consent to the evaluations. Mason qualified for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and began receiving special education services related to his learning and emotional disabilities at a new school. His parents have been included and participate in each meeting that has followed and are more confident in the help he is receiving. Mason says he is excited about his new school because he likes the charts he gets to keep (the visual aids that he uses to track his daily routine).

Mason is now on a pathway to receive the education he deserves. He has a much greater chance to succeed because his school, DCS, behavioral health team and family are working together, and because his parent's now feel empowered to make decisions to address his educational needs. This empowerment came from the opportunity FosterEd provides to members of a student's team to learn more, talk more, and achieve more as a unit whose sole focus is the student's educational success.

* We have changed the actual name of the student referenced in this story to protect the student's privacy.



A DEEP COMMITMENT TO DATA, LEARNING AND EVALUATION

It is critically important to FosterEd that our work be informed and driven by data. Careful consideration of data can help us improve our services to individual students, hold ourselves accountable to our model, help us assess the ways we are improving conditions for youth, and ensure we keep our eyes on the big picture of how students in foster care in Arizona are faring. We use multiple levels of data to understand our impact and inform our cycle of continuous program improvement:

Program Data

In 2016, FosterEd developed and began using an educational case management system called EdTeamConnect, or ETC. Education Liaisons use ETC to track their work with individual students. This includes, among other things, recording the names, roles, and contact information for each student's educational champion and team members; making notes of their interactions with each student; and tracking the educational goals set with each student. In 2018, we made some technical improvements to ETC, including updating ETC's goal categorization and interface, reflecting the central role that education goal-setting plays in our work.

We also established a data feedback loop that is proving to be a powerful tool for maximizing our impact, helping us map out where we should focus our energy, and to identify any shifts in focus we should make. For example, data is allowing us to understand our most and least common referral sources and helping us adjust our outreach efforts accordingly. In addition, through ETC data, we have learned that more than 50% of students served in our intensive tier are living in group home placements, which has allowed us to assign clusters of volunteers to students at the same group home. Data extracts from ETC also provide an important supervision and oversight tool. It helps us track whether we are operating at full capacity or have the ability to serve additional students, and allows Education Liaisons and their supervisors to review how the work is going at an individual student level, across an Education Liaison's roster of students, and program-wide.

Looking ahead, we plan to use ETC program data to help us ensure that our services are being distributed equitably in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender identity. We also hope to further explore and understand how and to what extent the type of foster placement that a student resides in impacts their connection to supportive adults who can play a role in their education.

Student-Level Education Data

In order to effectively serve students, Education Liaisons also need to be able to access student educational data. At this time, Education Liaisons are primarily accessing this data through school districts' student/parent portal systems. Regularly checking on educational data, such as students' attendance, coursework, and behavior, is helpful in several ways: (1) the data provides an "early warning" system, allowing Education Liaisons to identify emerging issues the student may be experiencing and proactively work on those areas with the student and education team; (2) the data helps the Education Liaison spot patterns and trends in the student's education and highlight those trends for the student; (3) reviewing historical data can be a useful tool for helping students identify periods of time when they were doing well in school, and reflect on what was happening at that time that facilitated educational success; and (4) the data helps students understand some of the components of academic success. We have found that using educational data in these ways, however, is only effective when these strategies are used in the context of a trusting and positive relationship between the Education Liaison and the student, when the student has internal motivation to achieve a particular goal, and when the student understands the connection between the data they are being shown and achievement of that goal.

Going forward, we will continue to partner with school districts to obtain access to educational data for students we serve in district student information systems (not only the student/parent portal component of these systems), as those systems are likely to contain more complete and up-to-date information.

Social-Emotional Learning Data

In our efforts to understand how students are doing in school and help plan for their futures, we understand that academic data tells only part of the story. It is also important that Education Liaisons understand students' social-emotional well-being, and its impact on their education. When FosterEd launched its statewide work in 2017, we began using a student survey to learn more about aspects of students' social-emotional learning that we thought might be most relevant to their education. Specifically, the survey seeks to understand students' sense of self-efficacy, how they think about their own future, and whether they feel supported by adults in their lives. As we work with each student, we re-administer the survey at regular intervals, to understand if and how these components of the student's social-emotional well-being change.

State-Level Academic and Child Welfare Data

In addition to examining student-level data from school districts, we are also committed to using state-level academic and child welfare data to understand how Arizona's foster youth are faring overall, and whether and how we are able to impact the educational trajectories of the individual students we are serving. As described in the enclosed FosterEd Arizona Preliminary Evaluation Report from RTI International (RTI), FosterEd and RTI have coordinated closely with the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) and the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) around access to data. In the fall of 2018, RTI was able to obtain and merge data from both agencies. We expect that RTI will repeat and expand upon this analysis in the fall of 2019, and present further findings in our next annual report.

While we have made important progress over the last year in how we collect data and incorporate it into our work, and in the types of data that we seek out, challenges and limitations remain. This will continue to be an area of focus for us during our second year of statewide implementation.

INTRODUCING OUR YEAR 1 EVALUATION

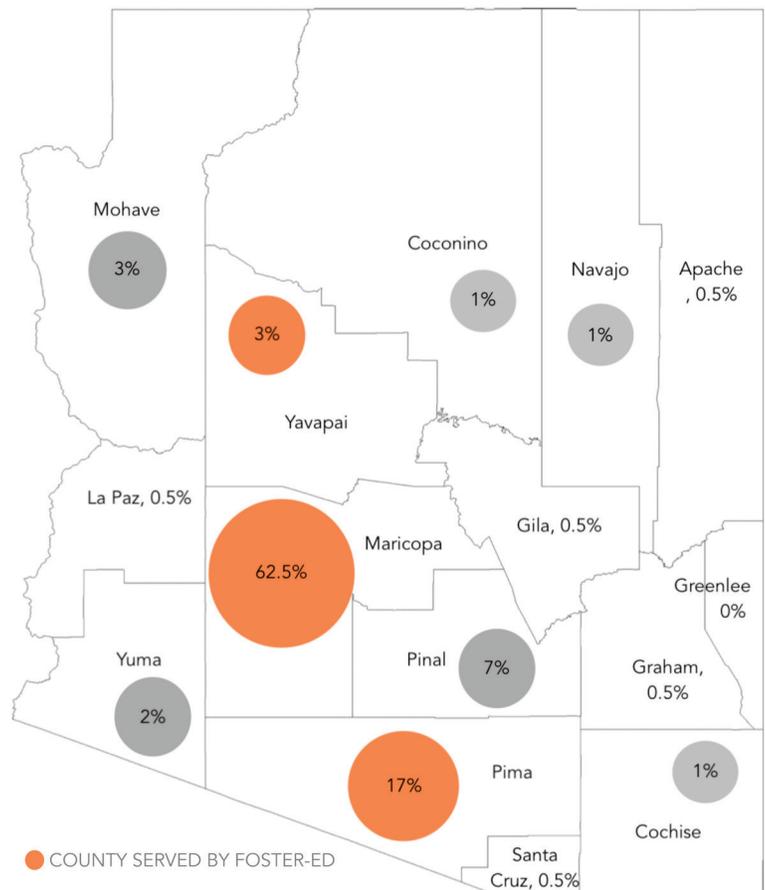
FosterEd is committed to continuously examining and improving our work, to ensure we are providing the best possible services to Arizona's students in foster care. As FosterEd began its statewide expansion process in 2017, we contracted with an external evaluator, RTI, for a two-year implementation and impact evaluation. Over the last year, we have engaged in regular conversations with RTI to provide updates on our work in Arizona, and have shared data with RTI for analysis. RTI's report provides a brief overview of our first year of statewide implementation (from August 2017 to August 2018), then offers three categories of data analysis.

Students Served and Supports Provided by FosterEd

RTI analyzed programmatic data extracted from FosterEd's educational case management system, EdTeamConnect. Their report presents data on the number of youth served through both the intensive and responsive tiers of support, the age distribution of students served, characteristics of students served (gender, race/ethnicity, whether the student has special education needs, and case type), length of service, and reasons for concluding work with students. It also examines the educational teaming component of the model, reporting on the number of individuals

engaged to serve on education teams supporting youth and the role type of these individuals, including teachers, biological parents, other family members, and child welfare workers. The report also examines data related to educational champions, describing what percentage of students were supported by educational champions and the role type of those champions. Finally, RTI also analyzed data on educational goals, identifying the average number of goals set with each student served and the types of goals most frequently set.

WHERE ARIZONA'S SCHOOL-AGE FOSTER YOUTH LIVE



Students' Social-Emotional Well-Being

Next, RTI analyzed data from student surveys focused on three components of social-emotional well-being as it relates to education: students' sense of self-efficacy, future success orientation, and connections with supportive adults. RTI developed the survey prior to the statewide expansion, drawing questions from existing, validated instruments. Education Liaisons administered the survey to students receiving intensive tier services. RTI's report presents a summary of findings of baseline surveys (surveys conducted near the beginning of the Education Liaisons' engagement with students), and a preliminary analysis of how students' responses to the surveys changed over the course of their work with FosterEd, for the subset of students who have already had both baseline and subsequent surveys.

Students' Academic Indicators

Finally, RTI's report provides an analysis of a merged dataset of data from DCS and ADE. In many ways, we view this data as our baseline from which we will continue to improve and support the statewide program.

RTI's report represents its preliminary evaluation of the statewide program. They will continue to assess our work over the second year of implementation, producing a two-year report at the end of 2019.

2017/18 BRIGHT SPOTS

Thoughtful Planning and Conscientious Execution

In 2016-17, the year leading up to FosterEd's launch as a statewide program, FosterEd engaged in a deep and thoughtful planning process around a number of key areas, including: refining our practice model to maximize the number of youth effectively served, building relationships with partners in Maricopa County, analyzing data to help guide statewide expansion, preparing for hiring, training, and onboarding new staff, and ensuring our case management system would support effective practice. In 2017-18, we executed those plans and found that our hard work in the year leading up to expansion paid off. We were able to launch the statewide program according to plan, making small adjustments as needed to be responsive to conditions and our partners' and students' needs.

Launch of Services in Northern Arizona

This past year, FosterEd began providing direct supports to students in Northern Arizona. FosterEd launched services in Yavapai County in July 2018. The County is home to

approximately 260 school-aged children and youth in foster care. Nearly 60% are elementary- or middle school-aged, and just over 40% are high-school-aged youth. Seventy percent of Yavapai County's foster children are placed in one of the Quad Cities. Because of the concentration of foster youth in the Quad Cities, FosterEd's early implementation in Yavapai County is focused on serving students in this geographic area, but will soon grow to be county-wide, and eventually will be a service hub for students throughout Northern Arizona.

Key partners in our early work in Yavapai County include DCS, Prescott Unified School District, Yavapai Accommodation School District, Yavapai County School Superintendent Tim Carter, Juvenile Court Judge Anna C. Young, and the Yavapai CASA for Kids Foundation. We look forward to collaborating with many more partners as we deepen our engagement in Yavapai County and throughout Northern Arizona.

A Growing Volunteer Program

In the past year, our volunteer program has doubled in size. We now have nearly 60 volunteers providing 1:1 support to FosterEd students in Pima and Maricopa Counties and in January we will begin recruiting and training volunteers in Yavapai County. In addition, FosterEd has broadened its volunteer pool to include



college students. This new cadre of volunteers from Glendale Community College, ASU's Public Service Academy, University of Arizona Honors Program, and Pima Community College Honors Program has allowed us to meet the increased need for volunteer support among our FosterEd students and broaden the diversity of our tutors. We are thrilled about the "near-peer" aspect that these young adults bring to their volunteer work. While all of our volunteers are compassionate and dedicated, there is an added value for some foster youth in seeing adults closer to their own age striving at school and serving their community.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT – LAURIE & “MICHAEL”



When new volunteer Laurie was first assigned to work with Michael*, all she knew was that he was an eighth grader whose reading level was low enough that it was negatively affecting his

“Learning to read as an adolescent is no easy feat. I, as an adult, am

learning so much from this whole experience that it almost takes my breath away. I see [Michael] grow, smile, tell me things are going pretty well for him, and I am so happy for him.”

– Laurie, FosterEd Volunteer

performance in every subject area. His teachers said that he was unmotivated and was failing most of his classes. Immediately, Laurie engaged with his FosterEd Education Liaison, group home manager, and his teachers.

As an experienced educator, Laurie knew to engage with Michael on things he was interested in, so they read recipes together, read about current events that he had questions about, and used programs and materials recommended

by friends with experience teaching children with learning disabilities.

At first, Michael struggled to take the tutoring help seriously. Laurie explained that she was a volunteer, with no reason to be there other than to help, and that she had committed to him for a year. He was pretty astonished by that and it changed his level of engagement right away. Soon he was motivated and anxious to succeed, asking her to stay later in their sessions, setting ambitious reading goals for himself, and even earning an award at school for his efforts. Laurie noted in one of her monthly updates, “I think he is very smart, he’s just had a lot of obstacles in his way. I attribute his growth to many things, but I do believe it has something to do with the philosophy of FosterEd.”

* We have changed the actual name of the student referenced in this story to protect the student’s privacy.

LESSONS LEARNED

It was expected that with an endeavor of this size and scope, we would face challenges that would require some course correction and learning. Two of our most significant lessons learned emerged in the areas of referrals and connecting with older youth.

Building and Maintaining Referrals for FosterEd Services

We know there is a high need for FosterEd's services, but in our first year as a statewide program we have learned that building and maintaining a steady flow of referrals takes concerted and continual effort. During the first year as a statewide program, we focused on serving students referred by our primary DCS or school site partners and experienced some challenges. With our school partners, our referral efforts were hampered by the lack of accurate and complete state-level data identifying the schools in which students in foster care are enrolled. We are meeting this challenge by working with each of our school-site partners to develop systems to more accurately identify which students are in foster care. With our DCS partner, we found that the large number of DCS Case Specialists coupled with the fast-paced and high-volume nature of their work was translating into fewer referrals for FosterEd services than anticipated. We are meeting this challenge by streamlining the referral process and increasing our outreach efforts, including having our Education Liaisons attend DCS staff meetings to keep education needs and services at the forefront. Even with these challenges, FosterEd was able to come within 10% of our service goal. In addition, this past fall we began accepting referrals from additional partner service providers. With these increased outreach efforts, we are confident that we will surpass our service goals this year.

Creating Connections for Older Youth

A key component of our practice model is ensuring that every young person we work with has an effective and committed Education Champion to support the youth in their education. This past year, as we began to implement our intensive tier services, focused on high school-age youth with a high level of educational need (a significant portion of whom reside in group homes), we learned that sometimes there was important work to be done before we could begin to identify—or even talk with a young person about—an Education Champion. A number of youth, especially older youth residing in group homes, don't feel like they have anyone in their lives who can serve as their Education Champion and many feel that they can only rely on themselves. We have learned that we need to meet these young people where they are, forge trusting relationships between them and their Education Liaisons, and then help them grow their connections with other team members and adults who can help them achieve their goals. Only then does a conversation about Education Champions resonate.

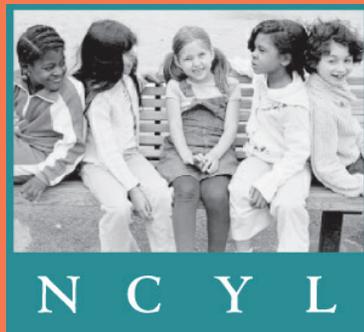


IN GRATITUDE

We and the youth we serve are in gratitude to the many leaders across Arizona who are deeply committed to doing everything possible to ensure children and youth in foster care are afforded every opportunity to succeed in school. Our vision is bold and is inspired by the incredible resilience and potential of all young people to thrive and succeed in school and life. This public private partnership between government, philanthropy and community is ensuring that Arizona's investment in foster youth is enduring, strategic and impactful. We extend a heartfelt and special thank you to the individuals and philanthropic leaders who have helped us secure our match and who are making this dream possible:

Annie E. Casey Foundation
Arizona Community Foundation
The Bob & Renee Parsons Foundation
Burton Family Foundation
Community Foundation for Southern Arizona
Helios Education Foundation
May and Stanley Charitable Trust
Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust

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National Center for Youth Law



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