

# CULTIVATING HOPE THROUGH ACTION:

## How Public-Private Partnerships Are Strengthening Child and Family Well-Being in L.A. County

### - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY -



*“Authentic collaboration takes time, heroes and trust. By working together, L.A.’s private and public sector partners can address our County’s most intractable problems. When it comes to catalyzing change, our collective value is so much greater than the sum of our individual parts.”*

— *Wendy Garen, President and CEO, The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation*

**G**overnment and philanthropy often share common goals and a capacity to enable widescale systems change. Yet, the two sectors can have vastly different mandates and different accountability structures, and at times they even seem to speak different languages. At their best, when they work together, they make ideal partners—philanthropy contributing nimbleness and a spirit of experimentation, while government commands the resources to sustain what works.

In Los Angeles County, such collaboration was catalyzed by the murder of an 8-year-old boy in 2013. This tragic death prompted the Board of Supervisors to empanel a commission of notable child welfare experts to examine systemic failures. The Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection’s findings and recommendations sparked a significant increase in philanthropic investment in child protective services, while dramatically shifting how County agencies work with each other and the private sector.

Since then, an increasingly durable and agile spirit of collaboration in L.A. has fueled an ability to test new ideas, assess their effectiveness, and bring them to scale in ways that are having a significant impact on child welfare reform. It has amplified efforts to ensure there are enough safe, licensed relative and nonrelative caregivers for children who need to enter foster care. And it is moving a previously siloed and reactive child protection system toward becoming a more integrated countywide

#### GROWTH OF PHILANTHROPIC INVESTMENT IN L.A. COUNTY’S CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM



child well-being system that seeks to ensure all families have what they need to care for their children well before crises occur.

As communities across the country work to address the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on many children, youth, and families and seek to build more racially equitable public systems, the solutions found in L.A. serve as a beacon for how to build cross-sector networks to benefit those who have been historically underserved by public and private systems. This report describes how partners have worked together to create infrastructure for collaboration, strengthen out-of-home care, and reimagine a comprehensive child and family well-being system.

# CREATING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

The Blue Ribbon Commission’s recommendations served as a clarion call to break down silos between County departments and increase the engagement of philanthropy, generating a broader sense of shared responsibility for the safety and well-being of children and families. But key players in the public and private sector knew that good intentions were insufficient. Together, government and philanthropic partners launched the following three core structures in service of building relationships, generating cross-sector understanding, and providing practical, hands-on support for the implementation of effective joint initiatives:

- CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING FUNDERS COLLABORATIVE**

An affinity group sponsored by Southern California Grantmakers, the L.A. County Child and Family Well-Being Funders Collaborative provides like-minded foundation and County leaders a space to focus on policy reform and identify opportunities for private support of the County’s Department of Children and Family Services projects. When launched in 2014 as the Child Welfare Funders Collaborative, there were 34 organizational members. Today, that number has more than tripled and includes some of Southern California’s largest and most influential charitable foundations.

- L.A. COUNTY OFFICE OF CHILD PROTECTION (OCP)**

The OCP is an independent County office tasked with improving the child welfare system through partnerships with a range of entities both within and beyond County government. Rather than overseeing the system through institutional authority, OCP brings stakeholders together to enhance collaboration and accountability.

- CENTER FOR STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS**

The Center is a first-of-its-kind public-private venture that helps the County and philanthropy partner more effectively to transform systems, promote equity, and improve the lives of children and families. It directly supports cross-sector initiatives and fosters a culture of collaboration. With homes in both the Chief Executive Office and Southern California Grantmakers, the Center is jointly funded by seven County departments and 20 charitable foundations. *(See back page of this report for a list of Center Core Funders.)*



The most effective public-private initiatives bring the best thinking of government, foundation, and community leaders to bear on the system’s most persistent problems.



## STRENGTHENING OUT-OF-HOME CARE

The 2014 Blue Ribbon Commission report noted a significant shortage of safe and appropriate homes for children and youth in foster care. This shortage was most acute in areas with large concentrations of families of color—such as South L.A.—where the highest numbers of children were entering care. Public and private partners came together to address this crisis through:

### Family Engagement Project

% of children placed with kin as their first placement in participating DCFS offices

**80%** vs. **33%**  
L.A. County Pilot      National Average

### Faith-Based/County Partnerships

have conducted community events to recruit more foster families



**1,100** attendees to date

**35%+** took additional steps toward becoming foster caregivers

### The Foster Together Network

 expanding impact

2017: Apx. **25** people attended the first meeting

2020: Nearly **500** people attended a virtual gathering

### ■ FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

OCP, with support from the Center for Strategic Partnerships and philanthropy, implemented a pilot project to find and involve family members for foster youth as early as possible. In DCFS offices where the project has been implemented, rates of kinship care average 80 percent, more than double the national average. In addition, the Center for Strategic Partnerships supported DCFS in engaging national kinship services leader A Second Chance, Inc., to help clear a backlog of more than 2,000 family caregiver applications and streamline the approval process in L.A.

### ■ FAITH-BASED RECRUITMENT

A Center for Strategic Partnerships initiative in 2016, jointly funded by DCFS and philanthropy, catalyzed ongoing efforts to engage trusted faith communities in recruiting more families from neighborhoods with the greatest needs. Since then, six faith partners have joined forces to form a collaborative foster care ministry and are advising the County's development of a Strategic Framework for future faith-based initiatives to support families and youth and keep kids closer to home.

### ■ COLLECTIVE IMPACT

The Foster Together Network was launched in 2017 by First 5 LA and The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, in collaboration with the Center for Strategic Partnerships and DCFS, to support systems change strategies. Its first meeting had about two dozen people in attendance. In its first three years, it embarked on a series of pilot initiatives ranging from coordinated data dashboards and faith-based foster parent recruitment to strategies for addressing equity and cross-sector collaboration. In 2020, a virtual gathering hosted by this robust collective impact effort attracted nearly 500 participants, including foster family agencies, community leaders, County departments, faith-based partners, kin and foster caregivers, and youth.



Photo courtesy of LA Family Housing

*“Collaboration is like a garden. When you first plan a garden, you plant three little plants, and they’re all two feet apart. But over time, they grow deeper roots, and they grow toward each other. Eventually the blank space disappears, and it just looks like a single plant. I can only imagine that the public-private partnerships within L.A. County will continue to grow in this way, organically deeper and stronger.”*

— Fesia Davenport, Chief Executive Officer, L.A. County

# BUILDING A COUNTYWIDE PREVENTION AND CHILD WELL-BEING SYSTEM

Recruiting and supporting foster caregivers is essential; however, keeping families together, when it is safe to do so, is even better for children. This shift from “business as usual” requires a reimagining of our child well-being system. These efforts are still nascent in L.A., but the County has taken several important steps toward bold reform, including:

## ■ COUNTYWIDE PREVENTION PLAN AND METRICS

OCP’s 2017 countywide prevention plan, the first cross-departmental effort of its kind in L.A., was developed with extensive stakeholder input and support from the Center for Strategic Partnerships. This plan is serving as a roadmap as the County prepares for implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act, which compels child welfare systems to increase their focus on prevention.

## ■ INCREASED COLLABORATION AMONG COUNTY DEPARTMENT HEADS

A cohort of new leaders hired between 2016 and 2018 are finding innovative ways to communicate across silos, maximize funding streams, and embed greater collaboration at all levels of their departments. These efforts are often fueled by philanthropic investments via the Center for Strategic Partnerships. In one notable example, philanthropy provided support to help leverage one-time funds from the Department of Mental Health to significantly bolster and expand County home visiting services.

## ■ ENGAGING PEOPLE IMPACTED BY THE SYSTEM

In order to achieve structural transformation and greater equity, the individuals and communities most affected must have a voice in how systems operate. L.A. County’s commitment to be guided by the voices of those who have direct experience with County services is evident in nascent initiatives such as the creation of a new countywide Youth Commission and a resident-led capacity-building effort in the Antelope Valley. These endeavors would not be possible without the support of philanthropic partners.



### Countywide Prevention Plan

Created by 10 L.A. County Departments

resulting in common goals, shared metrics, cross-departmental strategies & expanded networks of prevention services

### L.A. County Home Visiting Program funding

55%+ over 3 years

2017:  \$90M

2020:  \$140M



### The new L.A. County Youth Commission

will empower Los Angeles’ youth to use their voice to help co-design and improve policies, programs, & services



## OPPORTUNITIES ON THE HORIZON

**L**os Angeles County is in the midst of transformative change. Never before have so many people, across so many sectors, shared a common vision for creating a proactive, preventive, and collaborative child and family well-being system.

Significant hurdles still lie ahead. As the country reckons with the ongoing health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the pernicious effects of structural racism, L.A., like other jurisdictions, faces unprecedented threats to child and family well-being. Nonetheless, a handful of new initiatives show promise for helping the County advance toward its goal.

The October 2021 implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act will direct additional federal funds toward evidence-based prevention services. L.A. County will also receive specialized technical assistance as one

of four jurisdictions selected to participate in Thriving Families, Safer Children: A National Commitment to Well-Being. This public-private initiative of the U.S. Children's Bureau, Casey Family Programs, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Prevent Child Abuse America is intended to help jurisdictions move from traditional, reactive models toward a more proactive, preventive approach.

This effort requires government and philanthropy not only to work more effectively with each other, but to wholeheartedly embrace new, more equitable working relationships with community-based organizations, the faith community, and people with personal experience with public systems. The goal is a richer, more complete safety net for the County's most vulnerable citizens—a seamless web of resources, ensuring all families have what they need to stay safely together and thrive. L.A.'s children and youth are worth it.

### TAKE ACTION

As collaborative, transformative child welfare systems change is achieved in L.A.—a jurisdiction of unmatched size, complexity, and diversity—we prove it is possible everywhere. We invite you to join us in our efforts.

- Provide opportunities to highlight this report at conferences, in presentations, and through media introductions.
- Showcase L.A.'s success to potential funders—individuals, foundations, and corporations—to cultivate their interest in investment.
- Join the national conversation on systems change, prevention, and transformation efforts through public-private partnerships and learning communities.
- Invest in public-private partnerships in your own jurisdiction.
- Facilitate introductions for those doing this work to legislators on the federal, state, and local levels.
- Contact your faith community and learn how they are working with the child and family well-being system in your community.
- Become a foster parent.
- Lift up the voices of parents and youth who have experience with the child welfare system, to ensure they are represented and heard.
- Support foster youth in your community with jobs, mentoring, and support services.

#### L.A. County stakeholders

- Join Foster Together Network.
- Become a member of Southern California Grantmakers' Child and Family Well-Being Funders Collaborative.
- Attend a Center for Strategic Partnerships briefing.
- Connect with our team to learn how you can invest in L.A. County pilots and initiatives that improve child and family well-being and generate models for the country. Email us at [csp@ceo.lacounty.gov](mailto:csp@ceo.lacounty.gov)



Photo courtesy of LAFH

## - CENTER CORE FUNDERS -

As of November 12, 2021

### Private-sector funders

The Ahmanson Foundation	Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
Annenberg Foundation	LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment
Ballmer Group	The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation
Blue Shield of California Foundation	Pritzker Foster Care Initiative
David Bohnett Foundation	Reissa Foundation
California Community Foundation	Specialty Family Foundation
The California Endowment	United Way of Greater Los Angeles
Casey Family Programs	Weingart Foundation
Citi Community Relations	W.M. Keck Foundation
The Carl & Roberta Deutsch Foundation	
First 5 LA	

### Public-sector funders

Department of Children and Family Services
Department of Health Services
Department of Mental Health
Department of Public Health
Department of Public Social Services
Probation Department
Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services

## - CENTER ADVISORY COUNCIL -

**Jarrett Barrios**, California Community Foundation

**Marsha Bonner**, Annenberg Foundation

**Christine Essel**, Southern California Grantmakers

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**Wendy Garen**, The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation

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The complete report can be found at: <https://rmpf.org/child-family-well-being/>

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The **Ralph M. Parsons Foundation** improves the well-being of the residents of Los Angeles County through responsive grantmaking in human services, civic and cultural, education, and health.

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Center for  
Strategic  
Partnerships



The **Center for Strategic Partnerships** helps L.A. County and philanthropy partner more effectively to transform systems, promote equity, and improve the lives of children and families.

[www.lacenterforstrategicpartnerships.org](http://www.lacenterforstrategicpartnerships.org)