



## First Place for Youth: An Overview

### THE NEED

Foster youth represent one of the country's most seriously disconnected and at-risk populations. Many of these youth have experienced severe trauma and neglect as children and, as a result, are highly vulnerable to homelessness, unemployment, undereducation, and poverty. *The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes*, a study of how foster youth fare as they transition to adulthood, revealed that by age 26,

- Nearly **40%** of foster youth will be **homeless or couch surf**.
- **20%** of foster youth **will not have a high school diploma or GED**.
- Less than **5%** of foster youth will **graduate** from a 4-year college.
- Over **70%** of female and **50%** of male foster youth **will be parents**, compared to 41% and 28% of their peers.
- Nearly **43%** of female and **74%** of male foster youth will have been **incarcerated**, compared to 6% and 23% of their peers.
- **More than half** of foster youth will be **unemployed**, compared to only 2 in 10 of their peers.

### FIRST PLACE FOR YOUTH™



Founded in 1998, First Place seeks to **help foster youth build the skills they need to make a successful transition to self-sufficiency and responsible adulthood**. Through its flagship program, My First Place (MFP), and other supporting programs, First Place supports at-risk foster youth at a critical time in their lives when they need to learn to support themselves. We currently serve youth in six California counties (Alameda, San Francisco, Contra Costa, Santa Clara, Solano and Los Angeles). In FY2017, First Place served a total of 1,460 youth and housed 556 youth in MFP.

Since its founding, First Place's work has been driven by two goals: provide results-driven direct service to young people who need our help; and change public policies to improve the lives of as many transition-age foster youth as possible. First Place believes that our direct service work drives our advocacy efforts, and that our advocacy provides the context in which our direct services can succeed.

### WHO WE SERVE

First Place serves 18-24-year-old youth who are in or emancipating from child welfare or probation systems. The typical foster youth entering the First Place program has been exposed to multiple traumatic events and was removed from his or her home when he or she was 11 years old. The youth was then placed into and removed from six different foster homes or placements. On average, our youth have "grown up" in the system, having been in the custody of the state for nearly eight years. The following statistics provide a snapshot of the characteristics of our youth at intake in FY17:

- 61% are unemployed
- 27% do not have a HS diploma or GED
- 69% are not stably housed
- 51% have been arrested
- 24% have children

## MY FIRST PLACE™

MFP is an education and employment program that employs housing and case management supports to enable youth to transition to self-sufficiency. We believe that housing is a stabilizing factor that enables youth to focus on their education and employment goals, and therefore provide youth in our program with apartments in the community. The MFP team, consisting of a Youth Advocate (a Masters level social worker), an Education and Employment Specialist, and a Housing Specialist, supports a youth in working towards healthy living, education, employment, and housing goals that the youth sets for him/herself.

- The **Youth Advocate** meets with the youth face-to-face at least once weekly to support him/her in developing healthy living skills and removing barriers to education or employment. Support is tailored to the needs of the youth and can range from discussions about boundaries, to healthy relationships, to budgeting, to counselling. The Youth Advocate has a caseload of 1:12-15.
- The **Education & Employment (EE) Specialist** meets with the youth at least biweekly to support him/her in pursuing educational opportunities, including earning a GED or pursuing higher education, as well as in identifying and pursuing employment opportunities. We encourage linked learning opportunities and career and marketable certifications when possible. The EE Specialist has a caseload of 1:30-36.
- The **Housing Specialist** secures apartments and supports the youth in learning how to be a good tenant. Often serving as the liaison between property owners and the youth as needed, the Housing Specialist conducts move-ins/move-outs, supports the youth with maintenance requests, and conducts routine housing inspections.
- MFP staff employ a youth-centered, needs-driven, trauma-informed approach to serve youth and use numerous evidence-based practices like Motivational Interviewing and assessment tools such as Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) to guide practice..

## DATA AND EVALUATION

First Place is considered a leader in the sector for its advanced use of data for program improvement and decision-making. MFP staff collect and store real-time data in a performance management system to guide staff supervision and coaching, monitor and assess youth milestones and outcomes, and ensure consistent high-quality implementation of the MFP service model. We are also engaging an external partner, Algorhythm, to help us create a statistical model that identifies effective youth interventions and predictors of youth success. This will allow us to serve youth more effectively. In 2014, First Place was featured as one of the country's **most innovative and highest-impact organizations** in *Moneyball for Government*, a book which encourages government to work to improve social outcomes by investing in programs that use data, evidence and evaluation.



Among youth who remain in program for at least 12 months, data from FY17 showed that:

- While 40% of the nation's former foster youth experienced homelessness by age 24, **86%** of MFP youth achieved **stable housing** at program exit.
- While only 78% of foster youth earn a high school diploma or GED by 21, **85%** of MFP youth earned their **high school diploma or GED**, or were actively pursuing their high school diploma or equivalent while in program.
- While only 20% of foster youth who graduate from high school attend college, **92%** of eligible MFP youth **attend post-secondary education** while in program.
- While only 29% of California's foster youth are employed after exiting foster care, **91%** of MFP youth **obtained employment** while in program.
- **96%** of MFP youth **retain custody** of their children.
- **98%** of MFP youth **did not have a new birth** in program.
- **94%** of MFP youth **did not experience an arrest** while in program.

First Place has been and continues to be committed to continuous evidence building. Our external formative evaluation conducted in 2012 by PPV showed that MFP staff were successful at providing comprehensive services in line with known research and best practices, and operated sites with fidelity.