

# FOSTERING FUTURES


EMPOWERING A  
GENERATION OF  
THRIVING ADULTS



Court Appointed Special Advocates  
Guardians ad Litem  
FOR CHILDREN

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NATIONAL CASA/GAL ASSOCIATION



What if every youth in foster care graduated from high school?

What if no young person aged out of foster care without a permanent family?

What if every young person exiting the system had a place to live?

What if every teen in foster care had the support to become a thriving adult?

What if we could disrupt the foster care-to-prison pipeline?

What if every young person aging out of foster care was employed at a living wage?

WHAT IF EVERY YOUTH  
WHO AGED OUT OF  
FOSTER CARE REACHED  
THEIR POTENTIAL?



# THE LONG ODDS OF FOSTER CARE

The transition to adulthood is a challenging time no matter what. Young adults who lack a support system are at even higher risk of hardship, and those who are in or have spent time in foster care are especially vulnerable.

## BY THE NUMBERS



**133,000+**

youth age 12 and older  
were in foster care in 2019

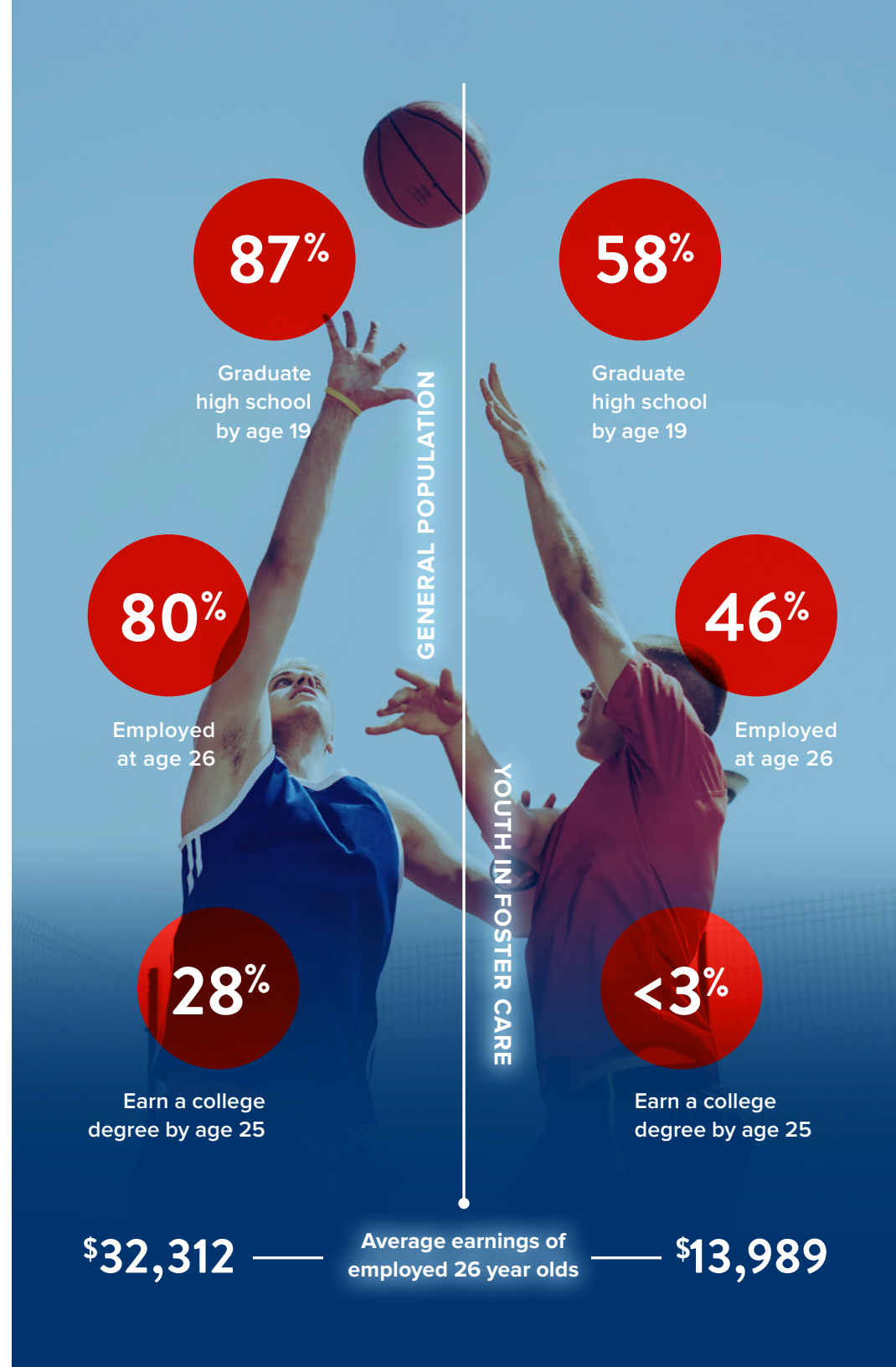


**20,000**

youth aged out of the  
foster care system in 2019



Of youth who enter foster care  
at age 13 or older will age out  
of the system





Every young person has the right to thrive in adulthood, no matter their zip code and no matter their childhood experiences.

## THE RIGHT TO THRIVE

Every young person has the right to thrive in adulthood, no matter their zip code and no matter their childhood experiences.

Every year, more than 20,000 young adults age out of foster care. Some experience the foster care-to-prison pipeline firsthand. Some leave the child welfare system and become homeless on day one. Some start families of their own—and in the face of untreated mental health conditions, the remnants of early trauma or crushing poverty—the intergenerational cycle of abuse can continue.

This is unacceptable, and we can change it.

## THE POWER OF A CARING ADULT

While poor outcomes are more likely, they're not inevitable. One key to overcoming these odds is resilience. We now know that resilience can be cultivated and that caring adult figures are essential to helping young people bounce back from difficult experiences and develop healthy responses to conflict and stress. For more than 70,000 young people across the country,

their court appointed special advocate (CASA) or guardian ad litem (GAL) volunteer may be the one consistent adult in their life who helps them set goals, connects them to community resources and helps prepare them for life after foster care.

## FOSTERING FUTURES

We believe high school graduation, living wage employment, social networks and healthy relationships, a place to live, and a thriving adulthood is within reach of every youth aging out of foster care. To help every single youth achieve their potential, National CASA/GAL launched Fostering Futures, a multi-year initiative to strengthen our service to the transition-age youth we already serve and expand our services to more young people preparing for adult life after the foster care system.

With Fostering Futures, we will implement an enhanced volunteer framework and equip our volunteers serving older youth to implement transformative evidence-based practices, activities and interventions that can help ensure every young person aging out of foster care is set up to thrive in adulthood.

# WHY FOSTERING FUTURES?

# RESILIENCE: THE GAME CHANGER

The effects of child abuse and neglect can have far-reaching and long-lasting consequences. So why do some youth in foster care struggle while others thrive?

The difference is resilience—the ability to adapt and recover after a traumatic event. Resilience was once thought to be an innate quality, but it is now widely accepted that resilience can be learned and cultivated.

Having a caring adult to rely on is a key component to building resilience. For many youth in foster care, their CASA or GAL volunteer is that person. Relationships that build trust, provide role models and offer encouragement and reassurance help bolster resilience, develop conflict resolution skills and build confidence.

Our volunteers also help youth strengthen “protective factors” that promote well-being and buffer against risk. Protective factors include activities that support academic success, cultivate professional skills and promote mental and physical health and well-being. Young people who feel connected to their schools, communities and peers are more likely to be resilient.



*Numerous studies show that caring relationships are the most critical factor promoting healthy and successful development for young people...When adults take an active interest in young people, show them respect, have compassion for their circumstances, and actively listen to and talk with them, these relationships help young people build communication and conflict management skills, concern for others, and a sense of belonging...Some young people in foster care have described their relationships with supportive adults as turning points in their lives.*

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative





# A VOLUNTEER WORKFORCE OF CARING ADULTS

Today, our network of programs and volunteers serve approximately one-half of the older youth in foster care—more than 70,000 youth over the age of 12 and more than 28,000 youth 16 or older. For these young people, their CASA or GAL volunteer may be the one caring, consistent adult in their life.

CASA and GAL volunteers listen. They follow up. They empower youth to set goals and support them in identifying lasting connections and building a network of supports. Volunteers are brokers across the court, foster care, education, and health care systems to improve the quality of services and make sure all professionals working on the youth's behalf are communicating.

Our network of highly trained Fostering Futures volunteers can be a powerful vehicle for implementing evidence-based practices to move the needle for this vulnerable population. Every Fostering Futures volunteer will receive additional rigorous training to help make sure every youth we serve achieves educational success, finds a living wage job or gets training in a trade, finds housing and can access resources so they can live healthy, fulfilling lives.

Our volunteers are uniquely positioned to make a life-changing difference for older youth in foster care, but we need more of them. Under Fostering Futures, we will employ innovative strategies to expand our volunteer workforce so every young person preparing for adulthood has the support and powerful advocacy of a volunteer.



# EVALUATING INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS

Our network of programs is already implementing innovative, promising practices in their work with transition-age youth. As part of Fostering Futures, we will evaluate programs like these, assess what works, incorporate these data-driven strategies into the Fostering Futures program model and make plans to scale evidence-based interventions nationwide.

## PUEBLO, CO

### EMANCIPATION YOUTH PROJECT

In rural Colorado, youth ages 15 to 22 can participate in a robust series of support groups that build independent living skills in areas including managing finances, finding and keeping a job, developing life skills, achieving educational success, creating permanent connections, finding and applying for housing and accessing transportation. Youth who have successfully completed the program report a 67 percent increase in their independent living skills.

## PHILADELPHIA, PA

### EDUCATION DECISION MAKERS

National CASA/GAL's member program in Philadelphia has trained more than 60 CASA volunteers to serve as court-appointed Education Decision Makers for youth who need special education services, are living in congregate care or who have behavioral and mental health concerns. The program has led to increased school stability, fewer expulsions and suspensions and a boost in academic achievement.

## BOSTON, MA

### TRANSITION AGE YOUTH ADVOCACY PROGRAM

With Boston CASA's project, advocates are trained to work with youth 16 and older and stay connected with them until at least age 22, and, in many cases, well into young adulthood. Boston CASA has seen an increase in the number of youth attending college and a reduction in delinquent behaviors, as well as increased services for older youth and new supports for youth who are parenting.



Every youth in foster care can achieve their potential and become a happy, successful adult. With Fostering Futures, National CASA/GAL is committed to achieving better outcomes for the 70,000 transition-age youth we already serve and expanding our service to youth who are no longer in the court and foster care systems.

National CASA/GAL has developed deep expertise serving older youth in foster care over 40 years, but we see an opportunity to strengthen the effectiveness of our advocacy by incorporating new evidence-based interventions into our model and focusing the efforts of our volunteers on activities that get the best outcomes.

While CASA and GAL volunteers advocate for youth in all areas of their life, Fostering Futures volunteers will focus on outcomes in the areas of educational success, building social capital, preparing youth for adulthood, living wage employment, access to housing and health—including improving access to mental health services, as well as preventing substance use disorders and unintended pregnancy.

We will consult former foster youth and innovative leaders from within our own network.

We will identify peer organizations that are getting promising results and explore how to cooperatively incorporate their best practices into our model. We will test promising practices within our network and evaluate which interventions to scale. National CASA/GAL will also pursue new partnerships with job programs and corporations to generate opportunities for living wage employment for the youth we serve.

Once these benchmarks are set and evidence-based interventions are identified we will build new Fostering Futures curriculum with learning tools to equip Fostering Futures volunteers to be effective



Fostering Futures gives a broad base of supporters the opportunity to advocate for transition-age youth in foster care and transform the future for the next generation.

on day one for as long as their support, advocacy and mentorship is needed.

To pilot these innovations, we will identify local CASA/GAL programs currently working with older youth and partner with them closely to launch the Fostering Futures demonstration project. We will work with these pilot sites to successfully implement the new program model and assist them in tracking data and practicing continuous evaluation.

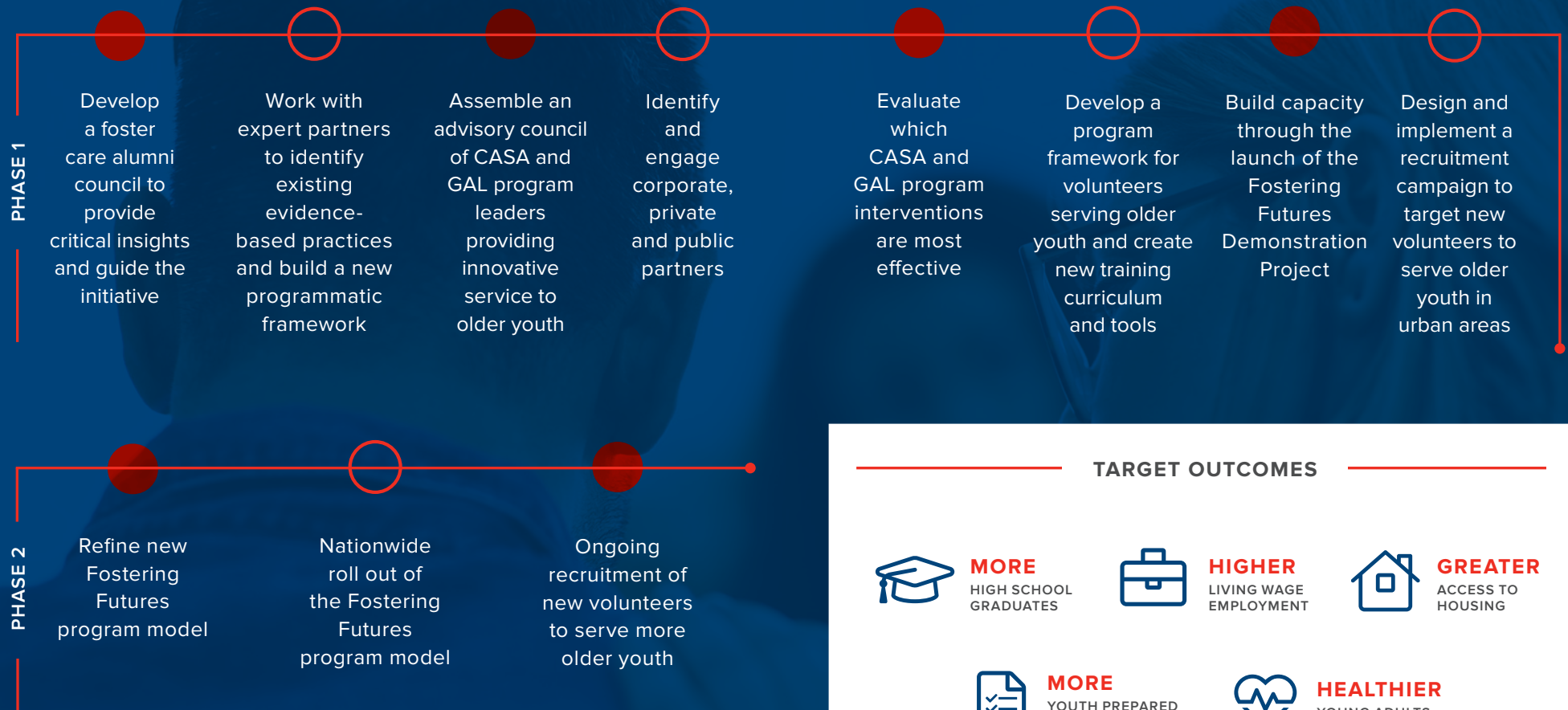
To close gaps in those communities, we will pilot a volunteer recruitment campaign to enlist new volunteers who are passionate about serving older youth, who match the diversity of the youth we serve and who are from the communities where they live. After the pilots, we will assess our results, update the model and curriculum accordingly, and make plans to bring the Fostering Futures program to scale nationwide.

## HOW DO WE GET THERE?



# FOSTERING FUTURES

National CASA/GAL has identified opportunities to strengthen and expand our nationwide network's service to transition-age youth. This Fostering Futures plan of action lays out an ambitious and vitally important scope of work to achieve groundbreaking life outcomes for every older youth in foster care.



## TARGET OUTCOMES



**MORE**  
HIGH SCHOOL  
GRADUATES



**HIGHER**  
LIVING WAGE  
EMPLOYMENT



**GREATER**  
ACCESS TO  
HOUSING



**MORE**  
YOUTH PREPARED  
FOR ADULTHOOD



**HEALTHIER**  
YOUNG ADULTS

# A GENERATION OF THRIVING YOUNG ADULTS IS WITHIN REACH

National CASA/GAL sees an opportunity to leverage the expertise of our nationwide network, create new partnerships and transform the future for a generation of young people in foster care. This is a bold initiative, and it requires radical optimism, groundbreaking conversations and innovative partnerships.

National CASA/GAL needs visionary philanthropic partners—including leadership investors—to make sure every young person transitioning from foster care to adulthood is resilient, has a network of people who will be there to support them and has the tools they need to reach their full potential and thrive in adulthood.



## LET'S GET STARTED





National CASA/GAL, together with its state and local member programs, supports and promotes court-appointed volunteer advocacy so every child in the United States who has experienced abuse or neglect can be safe, have a permanent home and the opportunity to thrive. Today, more than 93,000 court appointed special advocates and guardian ad litem volunteers serve more than 240,000 children and youth, but many more are facing court and child welfare systems alone. National CASA/GAL is working in partnership with its state and local programs in 49 states and D.C. to close the gap.



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**[nationalcasagal.org](http://nationalcasagal.org)**