



FOSTER CARE BRIEF

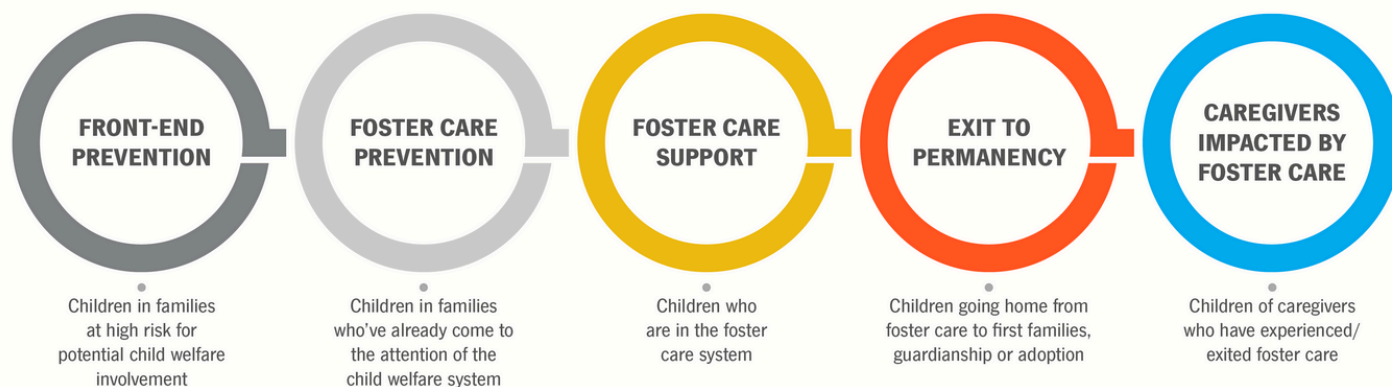
For 30 years, Friends of the Children has been empowering youth and families who have been impacted by the foster care system. Our enrollment process focuses on youth who are highest risk of entering, or who are already involved in the foster care system. In our program, 30% of youth have experienced out-of-home placement and nearly 30% of caregivers have experienced foster care themselves. Our youth and family-led, trauma informed approach supports the health and well-being of children and families together with these goals in mind:

- Promoting safe and well-supported children in families
- Providing hope-inspiring services that mitigate trauma and promote well-being
- Preventing further involvement with the child welfare system

OUR MODEL

In partnership with child welfare systems, schools and community-based organizations, Friends of the Children invites children ages 4-6 and pairs them with a salaried, professional mentor - called a Friend - who stays with them from kindergarten through graduation – 12+ years, no matter what.

We work with partners to identify families along the child and family well-being continuum to ensure that our model is serving the children and families who need us most:



Ultimately we want all parents to have the supports they need to be the parents they want to be, and for all kids to get to be kids – living safely at home with their families.

When Mark* was 6 years old, his family lost all their possessions in an apartment fire. Soon after, their car was totaled. Dad, primary caregiver to Mark and his brother, had struggled with his mental health over the years, but the compounding events made things feel especially hard. Ultimately, the school filed a report with Child Protective Services (CPS). Because of the close relationship between Friends of the Children and the child welfare system, the CPS caseworker contacted Mark's Friend to discuss what supports Friends of the Children could provide to the family. The Friends of the Children team connected Dad to robust mental wellness services and Mark's Friend stepped in to be even more actively involved in Mark and his sibling's academics. As a result of this trust and partnership, the children were able to remain with Dad safely at home and not be placed into the foster care system.

In 2022, the number of children in the U.S. who entered foster care was 186,602. That includes 9,054 children who were only 5 years old at the time of entry - a 9% decrease from 2021.* With the accelerated expansion of the Friends of the Children model, and our focus on prevention, safety and family stability - we celebrate progress toward our goal to reduce the number of 5-year-olds experiencing foster care by 10%.

ADVANCING FOSTER CARE OUTCOMES

- Preventing Entry into Foster Care: Data from a 3-year pilot project show that when families at highest risk of foster care entry have a Friend, children don't go into care: Not a single child with a Friend entered the system.
- Shortening Lengths of Stay: In an exploratory outcome study, children invited into Friends from foster care experienced lengths of stay 6 months shorter than a like comparison group.
- Reducing Foster Care Re-Entry: Data from a pilot project show that in families that are reunified, no child with a Friend has re-entered the foster care system within 24 months.

CELEBRATING LIFE OUTCOMES

Friends of the Children has developed a strong reputation based on the achievement of proven, measurable outcomes for youth facing the greatest challenges. We don't just achieve strong program outcomes – we celebrate lasting life outcomes for young people. Young adults who experience involvement with the foster care system and who graduate from the program achieve our three long-term outcomes at the same rate as all our program participants – remarkable results considering the national statistics for youth transitioning out of foster care:

- 83% of youth with Friends graduate high school, while 55% without a Friend graduate high school;
- 93% of youth with Friends avoid the juvenile justice system, compared to 74% without Friends avoid the juvenile justice system;
- 98% of youth with Friends avoid early parenting, while only 74% without a Friend wait to parent until after their teen years; and
- In addition, while young adults who've experienced foster care are just as likely as their peers to have college aspirations, only 32 to 45 percent pursue higher education after high school. At Friends of the Children, we celebrate the fact that 92% of our program graduates go on to enroll in post-secondary education, serve our country, or become employed in a living wage job.

CAREGIVER IMPACT: BUILDING PROTECTIVE CAPACITIES

The work Friends do with youth and caregivers is highly individualized and intentional. About 30% of our caregivers were in foster care as a child and 60% of those who had been in care, aged out of care as adults. Our two-generation approach works with caregivers to build parenting skills, empower systems navigation and self-advocacy, and meet concrete needs. Here's what caregivers have to say about Friend's impact:

86%

said Friends supported them to BETTER UNDERSTAND THEIR CHILD'S NEEDS/ STRENGTHS and 88% said their child's behavior had improved, making their home a more positive place.

said Friends helped STRENGTHEN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS and 84% said Friends supported them to spend more time with other children.

84%

91%

said Friends helped them SUPPORT their child's SCHOOL SUCCESS and 84% said Friends helped make their relationships with school personnel stronger.

said Friends connected them to CONCRETE SUPPORTS that enrich and stabilize their family and 77% said Friends promoted their ability to navigate systems and build community connections.

92%

TWO-GENERATION (2GEN) IMPACT RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL (RCT)

In 2022 we launched a new RCT study, funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and conducted in collaboration with the University of Notre Dame's Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities. The study will examine the impact our model has helping families build protective capacities that reduce the risk of maltreatment and promote safety and stability in families.

"Friends of the Children has helped me become a better parent/person. They have assisted me in becoming a better advocate for myself/children. They have let me know that there are endless possibilities!!!"

- Caregiver