

2009 – 2013

Strategic Plan



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- Strengthen our core program model
- Advocate for transition age foster youth
- Expand our presence in high-need regions of California



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First Place would like to express its gratitude to everyone who participated in the creation of the organization's five-year Strategic Plan, especially staff and Board members. None of this would have been possible without the tremendous support of the Bridgespan Group, David Hunter of Hunter Consulting LLC, and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation! We would also like to thank the Tipping Point Community and the Harvard Business School Alumni Community Partners Program for their early efforts to help prepare First Place to undertake this plan.

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OUR MISSION

It is the mission of First Place to support youth in their transition from foster care to successful adulthood by promoting choices and strengthening individual and community resources.

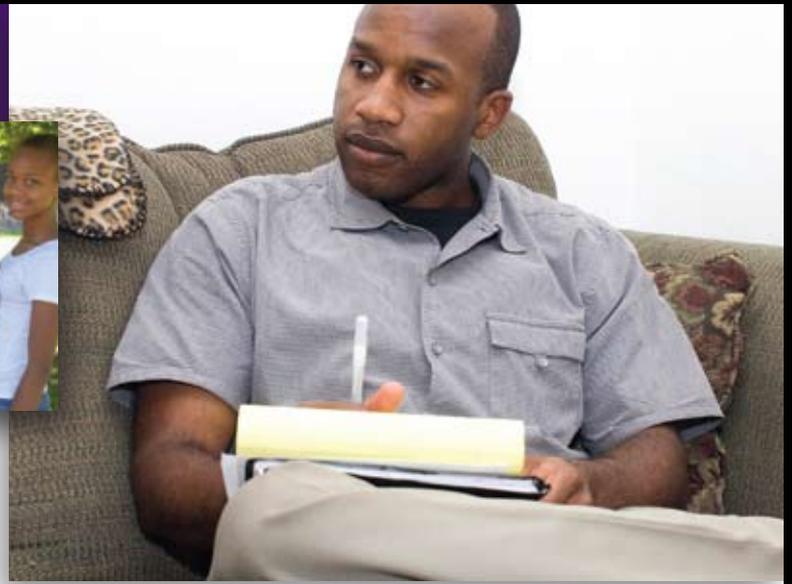
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2008, First Place marked its 10th anniversary. We celebrated our remarkable accomplishment of developing a successful national model that changes the trajectory of youth's lives through innovative housing, employment and education support.

While marking the close of an incredible decade, we also dedicated much time and effort to imagining the next chapter of First Place's story. We are now set to embark on an ambitious Strategic Plan for 2009-2013. The plan calls for increasing our impact with highly vulnerable transition age foster youth across California by more than doubling the number of youth in our housing program. At plan's end, we will be changing the lives of 16 percent of the State's foster youth who would otherwise exit foster care homeless, unemployed and lacking a strong educational foundation.

The case for statewide expansion is clear. Currently, there are over 513,000 foster children living in the United States, with the lion's share (80,000) residing in California. In fact, California has almost as many youth in care as New York, Florida, and Texas combined. Of these youth, approximately 5,000 age out each year and for them, the outlook is grim. Studies show that:

- Nearly two-thirds of transitioning foster youth in California face imminent homelessness
- Forty-six percent of California's foster youth drop out of high school, as compared to 30 percent of non-foster youth
- Three percent of former foster youth will receive their Bachelor's degree, as compared to 27 percent of the general population
- Fifty-one percent of former foster youth will be unemployed upon emancipation
- By age 17, young women in foster care are twice as likely to become pregnant as their peers



Our decade of experience has demonstrated that with the right support, transition age foster youth can map a different path for their lives. First Place participants defy the odds in a host of ways. For example:

- 92 percent of our youth maintain housing after exiting the program
- 77 percent exit our program with a high school diploma or GED certificate
- 87 percent enroll in post secondary education
- 72 percent maintain a job or increase wages while in program
- 93 percent of young mothers delay having an additional child while in program

Building on these proven successes, First Place worked closely with key stakeholders, community members, youth, staff and the Board of Directors to chart a bold course of action for the next five years. The plan outlines three strategic goals:

Help youth achieve and sustain higher measures of success. First Place will strengthen our core programs, expand education and employment services; add next generation “alumni” services; ensure highest-risk youth receive priority for services; and conduct an external evaluation to demonstrate program effectiveness.

Effectively advocate for transitioning foster youth. First Place will support policy changes at the federal level; work to sustain funding at the state level; and increase knowledge in the field of transitioning foster youth by disseminating First Place’s best practices model.

Expand our presence to fill more need across the state. First Place will refine and expand our program services as needed in our four core Bay Area counties. However, as each of these counties is nearing saturation, we will concentrate our growth in high-need regions across California, such as Los Angeles and Sacramento counties.

These goals are bold, but achievable. We could never have come this far without the help of countless partners and supporters who believed in our mission over the last ten years. If we continue to work together, we can move even closer to our goal of bringing an end to the homelessness and poverty facing transition age foster youth.

OUR HISTORY

Ten years ago, First Place was founded as a grassroots organization to provide hope and opportunity to youth aging out of foster care. The organization created a first of its kind supportive housing program that couples access to safe, permanent housing with critical emotional and life skills support. The program model has been refined over the years to add several key components, including a community resource center in downtown Oakland, a program designed specifically to meet the needs of high-risk youth living in group homes, and services tailored for young parents. Today, First Place enjoys a national reputation for excellence in helping former foster youth fundamentally change their lives through access to housing, educational advancement and gainful employment.

IMPACT OF FIRST PLACE

First Place is the largest provider of housing for former foster youth in California. Since 1998, First Place has served more than 3,500 youth.

Summer 1998

First Place was founded by Amy Lemley and Deanne Pearn, graduate students at the UC Berkeley Goldman School of Public Policy.

Spring 1999

First Place launches the Alameda County Foster Youth Alliance, a 12-member collaborative designed to create a collective advocacy voice for Alameda County foster youth, improve service coordination among providers, and raise funds to fill critical service gaps.

Spring 2000

First Place receives first government grant from the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth.

2002

First Place housed 30 youth and served 350 youth altogether.

1998

Fall 1998

First fundraiser for First Place is hosted by Eugene Smolensky, former Dean of the Goldman School of Public Policy. The event, held in Smolensky's backyard, raises \$7,000 for First Place. Foundation grants from the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund and the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund quickly follow.

Summer 1999

Initial wave of former foster youth from Alameda County move into newly constructed East Oakland apartments.

Fall 1999

First Place launches the Emancipation Specialist Program (First Foundation) to work with high-risk youth living in Alameda County group homes.

Summer 2000

First Place initiates a third program, the Emancipation Training Center (First Steps).

Summer 2001

First Place is a key participant in the development of California's sustainable public funding source, the Transitional Housing Program-Plus, for housing transition age youth.



Summer 2003

The US Department of Health and Human Services selects the Emancipation Specialist Program as one of 20 best practice programs. First Place begins housing youth from San Francisco County.

Spring 2005

First Place begins housing former foster youth in Contra Costa County.

2006

First Place housed 122 youth and served 593 youth altogether.

Spring 2007

First Place implements an innovative housing program known as PATH, which builds upon positive, permanent relationships already existing in the lives of young people.

Spring 2008

First Place hosts its 10th Anniversary celebration dinner and benefit concert, raising more than \$150,000.

Spring 2008

First Place and Affordable Housing Associates open the Madison Apartments located in downtown Oakland.



2008

2004

First Place housed 50 youth and served 450 youth altogether.

Winter 2005

The Board of Directors chooses Sam Cobbs as new Executive Director.

Summer 2007

Sam Cobbs testifies before Congress in support of former foster youth.

Fall 2007

First Place opens a standalone center in Solano County and begins housing 30 youth.

Summer 2008

First Place served more youth than ever before: 239 youth and 97 children were housed in FY07-08 and overall, more than 900 youth received services across four counties.

STRATEGIC PLAN PROCESS

After successfully completing the goals from our previous five-year strategic plan ahead of schedule, First Place began the process of formulating a new plan early in 2008. The intensive process, supported by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, spanned six months and incorporated input from a wide range of stakeholders, including community members, board, staff and youth.

As a precursor to the business plan, First Place engaged in a four-day Theory of Change workshop led by David Hunter of Hunter Consulting, LLC. Over the course of the workshop, stakeholders wrestled with critical questions facing First Place and re-examined our mission, vision and direction. Among the questions we considered were:

- Who is our target population? Will First Place continue to serve only former foster youth or low-income youth in general? Will the organization serve all former foster youth or only those with the highest risk factors?
- Which program services are vital to our youth? Which ones are critical to the future success of the organization?
- Should First Place grow our program outside the Bay Area? Should First Place expand our reach deeper into existing communities?

At the conclusion of the Theory of Change work, First Place re-confirmed our commitment to supporting foster youth ages 16-24 in making a successful transition to adulthood. We also clarified that we achieve greatest impact with youth by a) providing our innovative brand of case management, supportive housing, and educational and employment services and b) leveraging our unique position and reputation as a high quality service provider to affect systems' level change on behalf of foster youth. Finally, we reaffirmed our commitment to measuring and evaluating our outcomes.

OUR VISION

All emancipated foster youth have the ability and the opportunity to become self-sufficient and make a successful transition to independent adulthood.

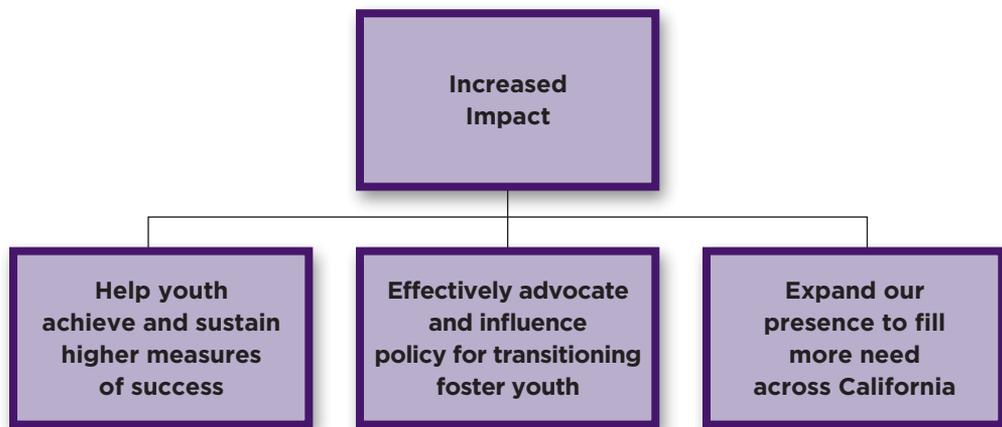
Armed with a clear Theory of Change, the Strategic Planning Committee began a rigorous process to formulate a five-year plan. Led by The Bridgespan Group, the committee worked diligently to assess:

- The efficacy of our program model
- The need and opportunities to increase our impact with transitioning foster youth
- Our organizational strength and capacity to expand our reach
- The likelihood of fiscal support for expansion

The work culminated in this ambitious plan that lays out a disciplined strategy for increasing our impact with high risk transition age foster youth throughout California.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

With the goal of increasing our impact on former foster youth, First Place has identified three strategic priorities for the 2009-2013 plan:



Help youth achieve and sustain higher measures of success.

In order for anyone to succeed in our society, they must have a solid foundation for housing, education and employment. Expectations can be no less for transition-age foster youth. Therefore, First Place will continue to set high standards for our youth and will support them in developing a plan to achieve the building blocks necessary to ultimately live successful, independent lives. To that end, our work with young people will focus on helping them achieve success in the four areas outlined below.

Proposed Measures of Success for Our Youth

Housing Permanency	Education	Employment	Healthy Living
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth will obtain permanent, affordable housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth who enter our program without a degree will achieve their high school diploma or GED certificate Youth with a high school diploma will complete two years of post-secondary education or career training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth will be working and earning a living wage Youth unable to work will receive Supplemental Security Income benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid risky behavior Defer parenthood while in program Refrain from involvement in the criminal justice system Develop healthy peer and family relationships

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

In an effort to ensure that the community's resources are deployed to affect the greatest change, First Place will also target our services to the highest risk youth in our community, as measured by the four key indicators outlined below.

First Place will ensure that it serves the highest-risk youth in the community by assessing youth on a set of risk factors:

Factor	Low Risk	Medium Risk	High Risk
Housing	• Housed	• Unstable living environment	• Homeless
Employment	• Employed with living wage	• Employee, earning below the poverty line	• Unemployed
Education	• High school graduate	• GED recipient	• High school dropout
Community Connection	• Connected to a caring adult, friends, family, social worker, therapist, case manager, or probation officer	• One or more community connections	• No community connections

To ensure that participants achieve success along all measures, First Place will also enhance education and employment support for youth by both expanding our menu of services and offering them for longer periods of time. Service enhancements will include job development, career and education counseling, and individual case management specifically targeted to the attainment of education and employment goals. In addition, youth will access services before they enter housing, during their two years in our housing program, and will continue as needed after exiting housing. These new services, known as Alumni Services, will extend for until the age of 24.



A final strategy for strengthening the program model is to undergo a comprehensive external evaluation. By the end of the five-year Plan, First Place will have strong external validation of the program model. This data will be critical to continuing to build the field of transition age youth services and persuading policy makers to make important investments in this population.

Effectively advocate and influence policy for transition age foster youth.

Building on our program successes, First Place will continue to focus advocacy efforts on ensuring that all youth exiting foster care have the opportunity to make a safe and successful transition to adulthood. First Place will work at the federal, state and local levels to improve the system in which our youth live and to promote the most effective use of public resources.

POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

FEDERAL

Policy Creation and Sustainable Funding

- Partner with supportive advocacy-focused organizations
- Work through partners' voices to communicate outcome data to shape policy and to ensure that foster care expenditures for older youth are invested in best practices models

STATE

Policy Interpretation and Sustainable Funding

- Partner with advocacy organizations at the state level
- Participate in high-level discussions shaping legislation and policy regulations affecting transitioning foster youth. Use data and program expertise to inform discussions
- Promote evaluation and accountability for public investments

LOCAL/REGIONAL

Policy Enactment, Program Implementation, Communications and Fund Development

- Inform Headquarters' policy work with local perspective and data
- Conduct county-level and regional communications, community relations and fundraising
- Participate in county-level planning and service coordination bodies
- Contribute best practices and lessons learned to help support local capacity building efforts

ADVOCACY AGENDA

Inform policy creation around foster care and emancipated foster youth.

Work to remove barriers to providing quality support to transition age youth

Work to secure and expand public funding for transition age foster youth



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Expand presence to fill more need across California.

One of the key questions explored during the planning process was whether First Place should increase our impact by deepening our presence in the four current counties or expand our reach to youth in other regions. An extensive analysis demonstrated that the housing needs of young people in the four Bay Area counties where we operate (Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, and Solano) are close to being met by First Place and other local providers. However, there is a shortage of services in other regions, such as Southern California where the majority of California foster youth reside. Thus, while First Place will continue to be the predominant provider of services to transition age foster youth in our four current Bay Area counties and will certainly seek to take on additional youth in each county should the need arise, the organization will also look for opportunities to serve youth in other high-need counties.

In evaluating potential expansion sites, First Place weighed a number of criteria, including:

- The potential impact of First Place's housing model (demand for services)
- Opportunities and resources (availability of public funding, unmet housing needs, presence of private funders and individual donors)
- First Place model viability (is county supportive of scattered site housing model?)
- Advocacy potential (county is active in local and state policy efforts)
- Infrastructure (First Place's internal capacity for expansion)

The evaluation demonstrated that the need and feasibility for expansion is highest in Los Angeles County where over 25 percent of the state's transition age foster youth in need of support are living, yet where limited resources are available to support those youth. The analysis also identified potential unmet need in Sacramento County where the second largest number of transition age foster youth needing support can be found.

To begin increasing our impact in high-need counties, First Place will enter a new expansion territory each year for the next two years once key milestones have been met. The proposed timing of the expansion is summarized below.

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Steady-State	Alameda San Francisco Contra Costa	Alameda San Francisco Contra Costa Solano	Alameda San Francisco Contra Costa Solano	Alameda San Francisco Contra Costa Solano Los Angeles	Alameda San Francisco Contra Costa Solano Los Angeles Sacramento
Growth	Solano		Los Angeles First Area	Further LA Expansion and/or Sacramento	
Ramp		Los Angeles First Area	Further LA Expansion and/or Sacramento		
Start-Up	Los Angeles First Area	Further LA Expansion and/or Sacramento			



FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

First Place has identified three options to expand our services to other regions in the state:

Scenario 1: Expansion to one location in Los Angeles, followed by expansion to Sacramento

Scenario 2: Expansion to two locations in Los Angeles

Scenario 3: Expansion to two locations in Los Angeles and followed by Sacramento

For the most aggressive scenario, First Place's annual budget is expected to grow to \$13.1 million by 2013. We anticipate that approximately 72 percent of the revenue will come from sustainable public sources. Private sources, including foundation and individual donors, will supplement the remainder. Private dollars will cover start-up costs for expansion sites, evaluation, infrastructure investments, headquarter costs, and operating reserve. Some of the financial and program milestones that we will achieve at plan's end are summarized below.

Key Metrics by End of Year 5	Los Angeles (2 locations) and Sacramento
Annual budget in FY2012-2013	\$13.1 million
Annual Housing Capacity	383
Cumulative Youth Housed	1,269
Staffing Levels	76 (program) and 21 (headquarters)

The annual budget for each year of the plan is projected as follows:

	FY08-09	FY09-10	FY10-11	FY11-12	FY12-13
Total Budget	\$7.3M	\$8.3 M	\$10.7M	\$12.9M	\$13.1M
Public Support Dollars	\$5.3 M	\$5.6M	\$7.4M	\$9.6M	\$9.8M
Percent	71%	67%	69%	74%	75%
Private Support Dollars	\$2.2 M	\$2.7M	\$3.3M	\$3.3M	\$3.3M
Percent	29%	33%	31%	26%	25%
Total Annual Budget Increase	—	14%	29%	21%	2%

Thanks to an expansive community of supporters, First Place has demonstrated a history of leveraging an average of \$1.5 million in private resources annually. We will need to build on this tradition to realize our plan, and have identified a mix of local, regional, and national foundation prospects to target. We will also expand our base of individual contributors. We are confident that once our programs have become part of the local community, we will engender support from a robust pool of local individual donors. Donors will feel good about their investment for three key reasons:

- They will have assurance that they are investing in a model that is changing lives and affecting critical systems level change
- Every dollar invested will leverage an additional \$3 in public resources
- As we reach steady state, we will achieve greater efficiencies and our administrative costs will be reduced to 11% of our total budget. In other words, 89¢ of every dollar will go directly to youth.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

To ensure successful implementation of the Strategic Plan, First Place will undergo many critical upgrades needed to support our program changes, advocacy work and expansion. The organization has created a timeline with several “Go/No Go” decision-making points. At each point, we will assess the strength of our governance, key staff, financial management and evaluation systems to determine if the organization can continue to move forward with various pieces of the Plan.

	2008-09 Fiscal Year	2009-10 Fiscal Year	2010-11 Fiscal Year	2011-12 Fiscal Year	2012-13 Fiscal Year
Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Theory of Change program model in current counties • Implement Efforts-to-Outcomes system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly review of education/employment program changes • Quarterly review of data quality • Review LA program fidelity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select evaluation vendor • Review early findings of evaluation • Develop criteria for summative evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select vendor for summative evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review findings of summative evaluation
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop LA County relationships • Foster good county relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow LA county relationships • Expand involvement in state policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop county relationships for Sacramento if required • Work to become informer for policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide outcomes results as input to inform and develop policy and programs at state and county levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide evaluation results as input to inform and develop policy and programs at state and county levels
Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise private funds for LA expansion • Analyze landscape • Make Go/No Go decision • Hire Regional Director 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ramp LA based on successful Go/No Go decisions • Leverage Alameda County staff • Hire key staff per plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide on further LA expansion or Sacramento entry • Raise private funds for either further LA expansion or Sacramento entry • Ramp based on successful Go/No Go decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steady state in all new growth counties • Planning for future growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future growth



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