

WEBINAR | DECEMBER 2024

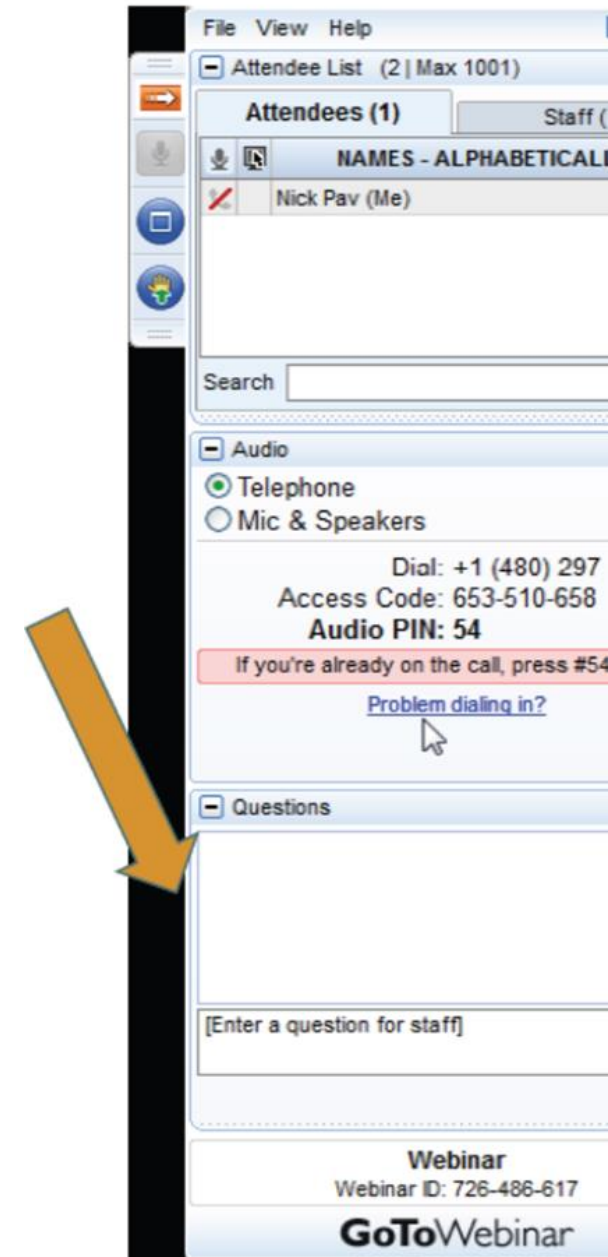
# Using Strengths Building Funding to Support the Well-Being of Children and Youth in Foster Care

**ALLIANCE**  
*for* **CHILDREN'S**  
**RIGHTS**



# LOGISTICS

- Webinar resources, including recording and supplemental materials, will be posted at <https://allianceforchildrensrights.org/resources/>
- All attendees are muted during webinar.
- Please submit questions using the "Questions" function on your GoToWebinar dashboard.



# AGENDA

- Building Support for Extracurriculars Funding
- Strengths Building in the Foster Care Tiered Rate Structure
- Engaging Caregivers, Youth and Supporters
- Strengths Building Implementation Recommendations



## PRESENTERS

Kristina Tanner, Special Projects  
Coordinator, Youth Law Center

Sara Rubin, Policy Coordinator,  
Alliance for Children's Rights

**BUILDING SUPPORT  
FOR  
EXTRACURRICULARS**



# CHANGING PERSPECTIVES IN POLICY AND PRACTICE

“Systems must think in an entirely new way about extracurriculars: as a *key intervention* for children and youth -- not just an extra.”

- Jennifer Rodriguez, Executive Director, Youth Law Center

“What we see in practice is that extracurriculars are being viewed as ‘extra’ or optional. The shift that needs to be made is to view these activities as essential *building blocks to healthy youth development.*”

- Makayla James, Former Statewide Policy Manager, California Youth Connection

# DEVELOPING SKILLS, INTERESTS, AND RELATIONSHIPS

"I had the opportunity to play basketball while I was in foster care. Basketball gave me the *building blocks and the essential life skills that I needed in order to be successful in life* and these were things I didn't learn while in foster care. Basketball was the only thing that provided me *stability no matter where I went or how many times I moved*. My coaches and the *lifelong connections* I made throughout these activities helped me learn what healthy relationships were. Without these activities I would not have been able to *work through my trauma* and I wouldn't have the skills I need to have a successful future."

- Kristina T., California Youth Connection Member

"Extracurricular activities are important for foster youth because it *promotes normalcy* within their time in care and helps as a *therapeutic tool for youth with trauma*."

- Katrina Q., California Youth Connection Member

# CLOSING THE EXTRACURRICULARS GAP

- Detailing the benefits of extracurricular participation for youth, families, and communities;
- Highlighting the legal and policy supports for extracurricular participation for system-involved youth;
- Exploring and removing system barriers to extracurriculars; and
- Making recommendations to increase extracurricular participation for system-involved youth.

Closing the Extracurriculars Gap: Prioritizing Extracurricular Activities as a Key Intervention for Children and Youth in Foster Care and Juvenile Justice – YLC



# YOUTH HAVE BEEN PUSHING FOR POLICY CHANGE FOR ALMOST TEN YEARS

- **California Youth Connection identified meaningful access to extracurriculars as a priority prior to 2016.**
- The following bills were introduced on this issue, but did not pass:
  - [AB 1984](#) (2016)
  - [AB 754](#) (2017)
  - [SB 219](#) (2019)
  - [AB 2945](#) (2022)
- CYC and YLC advocated for rates reform in 2023 and are playing a critical role in implementation.

# ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION BENEFITS

## **Promotes Healthy Development**

Helps build resiliency and positive self-identity; counteracts the harmful effects of trauma; complements behavioral health interventions

## **Supports Positive Behaviors**

Improves academic performance, builds leadership and self-discipline skills, and reduces risky behaviors

## **Builds Positive Relationships**

Builds healthy relationships with peers who share common interests and connections with supportive adults

## **Benefits Caregivers and Systems**

Provides support for caregivers, improves placement stability and opportunities for permanency

# BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

- Lack of prioritization and focus;
- Insufficient funding;
- Lack of knowledge of community resources, and
- Transportation.

# **STRENGTHS BUILDING IN THE TIERED RATE STRUCTURE**

Supporting the physical, emotional, and social well-being of children and youth in foster care



# FOSTER CARE TIERED RATE STRUCTURE

- Rate based on a child's assessed level of need
- Funding shifts away from being connected to the placement type and is connected to the needs of the child
- Two new categories of funding:
  - Strengths Building
  - Immediate Needs

[cdss-summary-of-foster-care-permanent-rate-structure.pdf](#)

[Bill Text - AB-161 Human services. \(ca.gov\)](#)



# TIERED RATE STRUCTURE

Creates a rate that for the first time:

- is based on the strengths and needs of a young person;
- provides funding to go directly to what a young person wants and needs regardless of placement – or even if they are temporarily not in a placement at all, and
- provides incentives for county and state level child welfare and children's mental health to de-silo, collaborate, and integrate implementation.

# Improving Outcomes for Children and Families in California's Foster Care System

## Permanent Rate Structure

### Permanent Foster Care Tiered Rate Structure Framework

Tier 1 (74% of children and youth) (Latent Classes 1 and 2 for the 0-5-year-olds and Latent Classes 1, 2, and 3 for the 6+ year olds)	
<b>Care and Supervision*</b> Paid to the caregiver	\$1,788
<b>Strength Building and Maintenance</b> Child and Family work with a Financial Management Coordinator	\$500
<b>Immediate Needs</b>	NA
<b>FFA Admin (for youth placed in an FFA)*</b> <i>Recruitment, retention, approval, training, etc.</i>	\$1,610

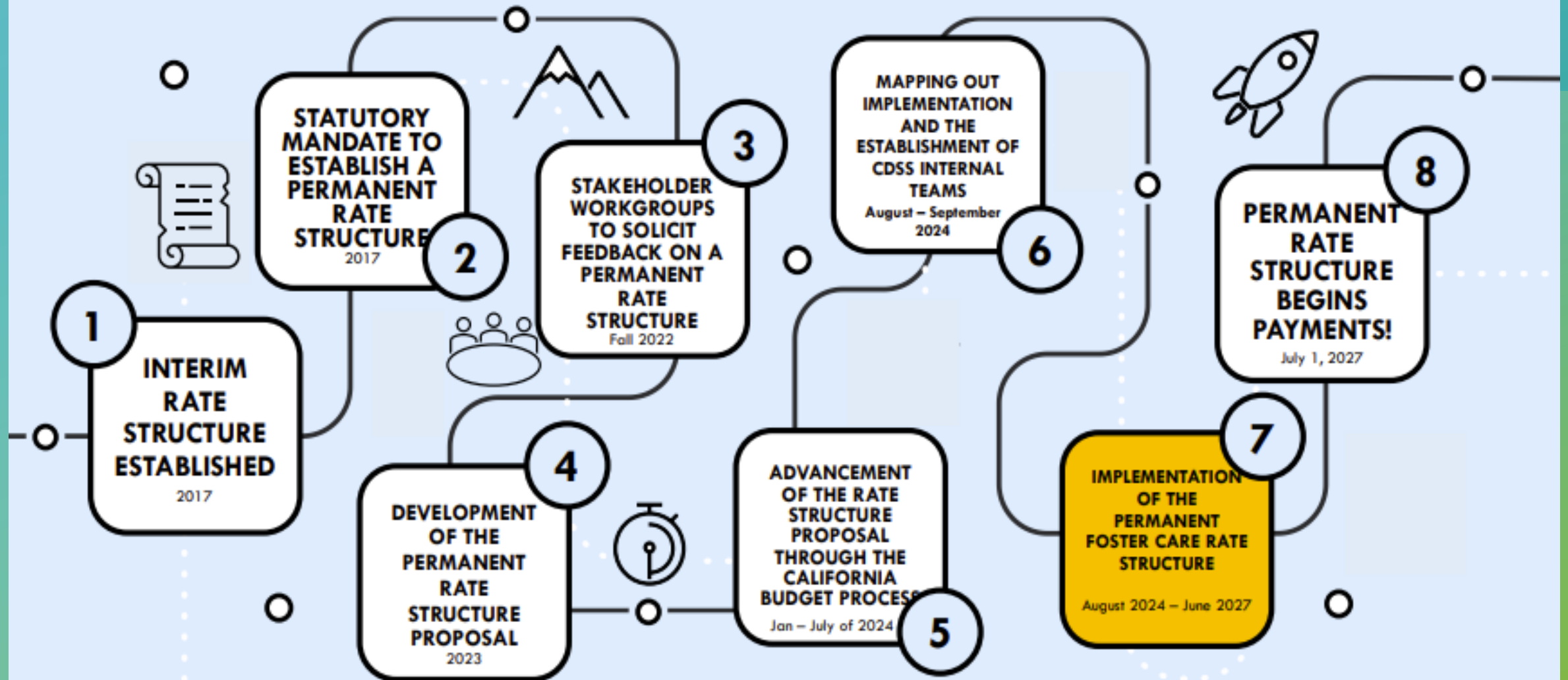
Tier 2 (19% of children and youth) (Latent Class 3 for the 0 – 5-year-olds and Latent Classes 4 and 5 for the 6+ year olds)	
<b>Care and Supervision*</b> Paid to the caregiver	\$3,490
<b>Strength Building and Maintenance</b> Child and Family work with a Financial Management Coordinator	\$700
<b>Immediate Needs</b> County or contracted provider coordinate services	\$1,000
<b>FFA Admin (for youth placed in an FFA)*</b> <i>Recruitment, retention, approval, training, etc.</i>	\$2,634

Tier 3 (ages 0-5) (4.5% of children and youth) (Latent Class 4 for 0 – 5-year-olds)	
<b>Care and Supervision*</b> Paid to the caregiver	\$6,296
<b>Strength Building and Maintenance</b> Child and Family work with a Financial Management Coordinator	\$900
<b>Immediate Needs</b> County or contracted provider coordinate services	\$1,500
<b>FFA Admin (for youth placed in an FFA)*</b> <i>Recruitment, retention, approval, training, etc.</i>	\$2,634

Tier 3+ (ages 6+) (2.5% of children and youth) (Latent Class 6 and 6a for 6+ year olds)	
<b>Care and Supervision*</b> Paid to the caregiver	\$6,296
<b>Strength Building and Maintenance</b> Child and Family work with a Financial Management Coordinator	\$900
<b>Immediate Needs</b> County or contracted provider coordinate services	\$4,100
<b>FFA/STRTP Admin (for youth placed in an FFA or an STRTP)*</b> <i>Recruitment, retention, approval, training, etc.</i>	\$7,213

\*Components of the rate that will receive a California Necessities Index increase.

# THE PERMANENT FOSTER CARE RATE STRUCTURE





# STRENGTHS BUILDING: INTENT

(1) Social determinants of health, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), positive childhood experiences, and other supports are critical determinants of life outcomes for children. Research shows that ACEs can have lasting, negative, and permanent impacts on childhood development. Many factors, including experiencing abuse or neglect, placement instability and disconnection from family and natural supports, leave children and nonminor dependents in foster care particularly vulnerable to the impact of ACEs.

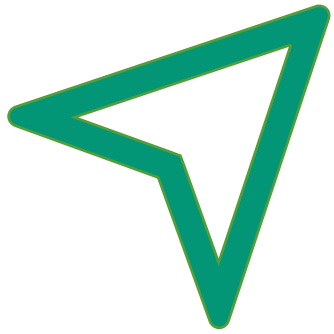
(2) Research also shows that positive childhood experiences, tailored to a child's or nonminor dependent's strengths, can lessen the impact of ACEs. Through positive childhood experiences, children can develop, build, and nurture strengths and personal autonomy, which may support the successful transition to permanency and successful adulthood.

(3) **Focusing on strengths building activities, by providing explicit funding for these activities, will help to prevent children and nonminor dependents in foster care from developing more complex needs and will serve to stabilize children, and, as applicable, nonminor dependents in their families**, which, whenever possible and consistent with federal and state laws for placement preferences, should include placement in the home of a relative, nonrelative extended family member or, in the case of an Indian child, an extended family member as defined in Section 224.1.

(4) **Strengths building activities should be culturally responsive, family centered, and permanency focused, and, in the case of an Indian child, consistent with the prevailing social and cultural conditions and way of life of the Indian child's tribe.**

(5) **It is therefore the intent of the Legislature in enacting this section to create a program to empower the children and nonminor dependents in foster care and their families, with support from the child and family team, to select and make decisions about the goods, services, activities, and supports needed to achieve the strengths building objectives.**

# STRENGTHS BUILDING: DEFINITION

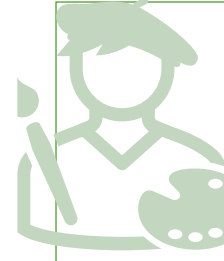


(c)(6) “Strengths building” means the growth or development of characteristics of a child or nonminor dependent in an environment or through an external factor that provides the individual with meaning and wellbeing through the provision of goods, services, activities, and supports. For an Indian child, the identification of strengths shall be informed by prevailing social and cultural conditions and way of life of the Indian child’s tribe.

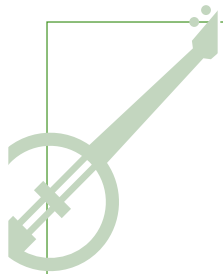
# STRENGTHS BUILDING FUNDING



Tier 1 -  
\$500/month



Tier 2 -  
\$700/month



Tier 3 -  
\$900/month

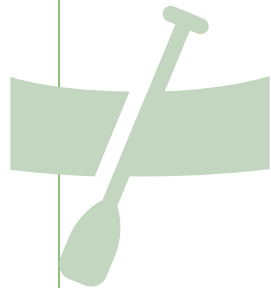
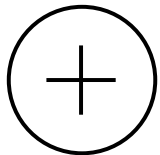


Tier 3+ -  
\$900/month

# STRENGTHS BUILDING FUNDING: NMDS IN SILPS



Tier 1 Care &  
Supervision -  
\$1,788/month



Tier 1 Strengths  
Building -  
\$500/month



# **STRENGTHS BUILDING PLAN**

- Plan the child and family develop to use the Strengths Building funding
- Strengths Building spending activities will be included in each child's case plan
- NMDs will develop their own Strengths Building plan

# FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR (FMC)

- FMC will administer the Strengths Building funds.
- Funds could be used to purchase directly or reimburse caregiver.
- YLC and others have advocated that funds be provided up front the caregiver and/or youth.
- State will enter into contracts with entities to serve as the FMC.





## **STRENGTHS BUILDING: ACTIVITIES EXAMPLES**

- sports, arts, and extracurricular clubs;
- academic supports like tutoring and mentoring programs,
- yoga, music and art therapy, and mindfulness programs.

# ROLE OF THE CFT

Support the child and family in the development of their Strengths Building Spending Plan, as age or developmentally appropriate and actively work with the child and family or NMD when goods, services, activities, and supports fail to meet program standards to identify supports that do comply with those standards





IMPLEMENTING THE  
TIERED RATE  
STRUCTURE: 5 KEY  
ISSUES FOR  
IMPLEMENTATION



# ISSUE 1: ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES SHOULD BE DEFINED BROADLY AND DRIVEN BY THE NEEDS AND INTERESTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL CHILD AND YOUTH

- Activities and experiences that:
  - build on a child's interests or help them explore interests;
  - provide them enjoyment and joy;
  - help them express themselves and their identity;
  - connects them to their culture and community;
  - allows them to have the "typical" experience of childhood and adolescence.
- Can include materials to support or facilitate an activity like books, laptops, gaming consoles, sports equipment, clothes.
- The State is encouraged to train caseworkers to engage children in identifying and exploring their interests to help design their Strength Building Plan.
- The State and counties are encouraged to provide youth and families information about available activities and opportunities, but not to create an exclusive list of activities.

# ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES EXAMPLES



# ISSUE 2: CHILD AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IS CRITICAL

- All young people are interested in and enjoy a large variety of enrichment activities.
- Caseworkers and all supportive adults must engage young people in conversations to help them understand the new opportunities that rate reform bring and how to identify activities.
  - Use all contacts to discuss this issue and to help youth explore their interests.
  - Be observant and pick up on cues:
    - “You like to play games on your phone. Are you interested in learning coding or something about technology?”
    - “You are doing really well in art at school. What do you like most about your art class? Painting? Drawing?”
    - In response to a youth who says “I don’t want to do anything.” “Can I tell you about some of the activities that I have heard about in your community?” “Can I tell you about some of the activities that I really love and enjoy?”

## **ISSUE 3: ENSURE A RELIABLE STRUCTURE FOR TRANSPORTATION THAT COVERS THE WHOLE STATE.**

- All stakeholders have identified transportation as a “make or break” area of implementation.
- State-led contracts that cover the state or regions can create a reliable structure to ensure that all youth no matter where they live can rely on transportation to execute their Strengths Building Spending Plan.

# ISSUE 4: PROVIDE AGE-APPROPRIATE SUPPORT FOR OLDER YOUTH

- The development of the Strengths Building Spending Plan should be driven by the youth and family.
- Young people in foster care, like all young people, need the support and guidance of their team as they are driving and leading their planning. Developmental psychologists call this “autonomy supportive” strategies.
- Effective strategies can include: (1) engaging in discussions with youth about their interests and what they enjoy; (2) noticing and verbalizing the strengths and interests you see in them; (3) providing examples of activities; (4) continually revisiting the conversation and offering opportunities.
- While NMDs in SILPs have full control of their allocated Strengths Building Funds, they will benefit from the interest, guidance, and support of their team.

# ISSUE 5: STRENGTHS BUILDING ACTIVITIES ARE CRITICAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFANTS AND TODDLERS

- Parent and me classes.
- Play groups.
- Physical activities like swimming lessons and play.
- Access to playgrounds and other outdoor spaces.
- Library reading groups.
- Music and movement activities.
- Purchase of materials and toys for play, exploration and learning.

# IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

- Updated training on the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard and how it interacts with other laws.
- Clarification on limitation on Strengths Building funds. Examples:
  - While the funds can be used to support activities for families and siblings, the funds should not be used to meet the independent right to sibling and family visitation.
  - While the funds can result in supporting a caregiver and giving them a “rest,” they should focus on meeting the child’s needs and interests.





# **ENGAGING CAREGIVERS, YOUTH AND SUPPORTERS**

Listening and learning from those with lived experience and their supporters

# CLEAR COMMUNICATION

## Involve children and families

- The ICPM emphasizes including children, youth, and family members in all decisions and service delivery. They should be able to clearly understand the roles of everyone involved and why they are involved.

## Be transparent

- The ICPM encourages being open, honest, and clear in all communications. This includes being transparent about your role and responsibilities, and modeling accountability.

## Use appreciative inquiry

- Appreciative inquiry is a strength-based approach that focuses on building positive relationships and building on the present potential of a situation.

## Seek input from stakeholders

- The ICPM encourages seeking input and perspective from stakeholders at all levels. This can include developing partnerships with community-based service providers.

# SURVEY OVERVIEW

Voluntary online survey  
conducted in June 2024

Targeted stakeholders in the child  
welfare system

Participants included caregivers,  
former and current foster youth,  
and service providers

- **Goal:** Gather input on the Strengths Building component of the new Foster Care Tiered Rate Structure
- **Aim:** Develop a pre-approved list of activities for funding

# STAKEHOLDER INPUT: SURVEY

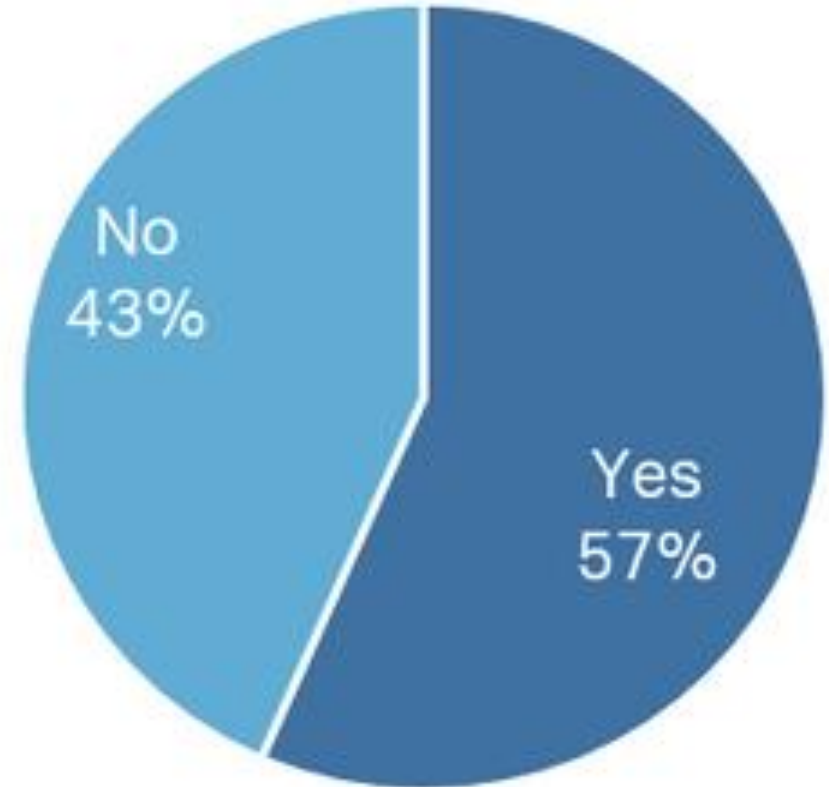
Youth in Foster Care	4
Caregiver	8
Parent	2
Service Provider	25
Lawyer/Advocate	1
Other	20

\*Survey gathered insights from 53 stakeholders in the child welfare system, offering a range of insights (some stakeholders represent more than one role in system)

# STAKEHOLDER AWARENESS

Analysis of stakeholder awareness regarding CDSS proposal of permanent foster care rate structure as part of the FY 24-25 state budget process

## Respondents Aware of New Permanent Foster Care Rate Structure



# STRENGTHS BUILDING IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

From Proposal to Reality



# STRENGTH BUILDING: PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

We asked survey respondents what activities were suggested to be included on a "pre-approved" list.



Diverse Range of Activities: Sports, Arts, Tutoring, Mentorship, and Holistic Therapeutic Approaches



Financial Support for Participation: Respondents highlighted the need for funding to cover not only the fees for activities but also the costs of transportation, uniforms, and equipment



Supporting Successful Transitions to Adulthood: Respondents expressed a desire for Strengths Building funding to support growth opportunities for the youth's future such as college prep fees and drivers education related costs

# CFT Role in Supporting Strengths Building Activities

What role should CFT members play?

## Identification and Planning

- CFT should identify and plan activities that support youth development

## Support and Facilitation

- Team should assist in enrolling youth in activities, ensuring transportation is available, and minimizing logistical hurdles.

## CFT Advisory Role for NMD's

- For NMDs, the CFT should primarily serve in an advisory capacity deferring to NMDs preferences

## Documentation and Accountability

- Ensuring Resource Families are facilitating youth's participation in activities and not misusing funds

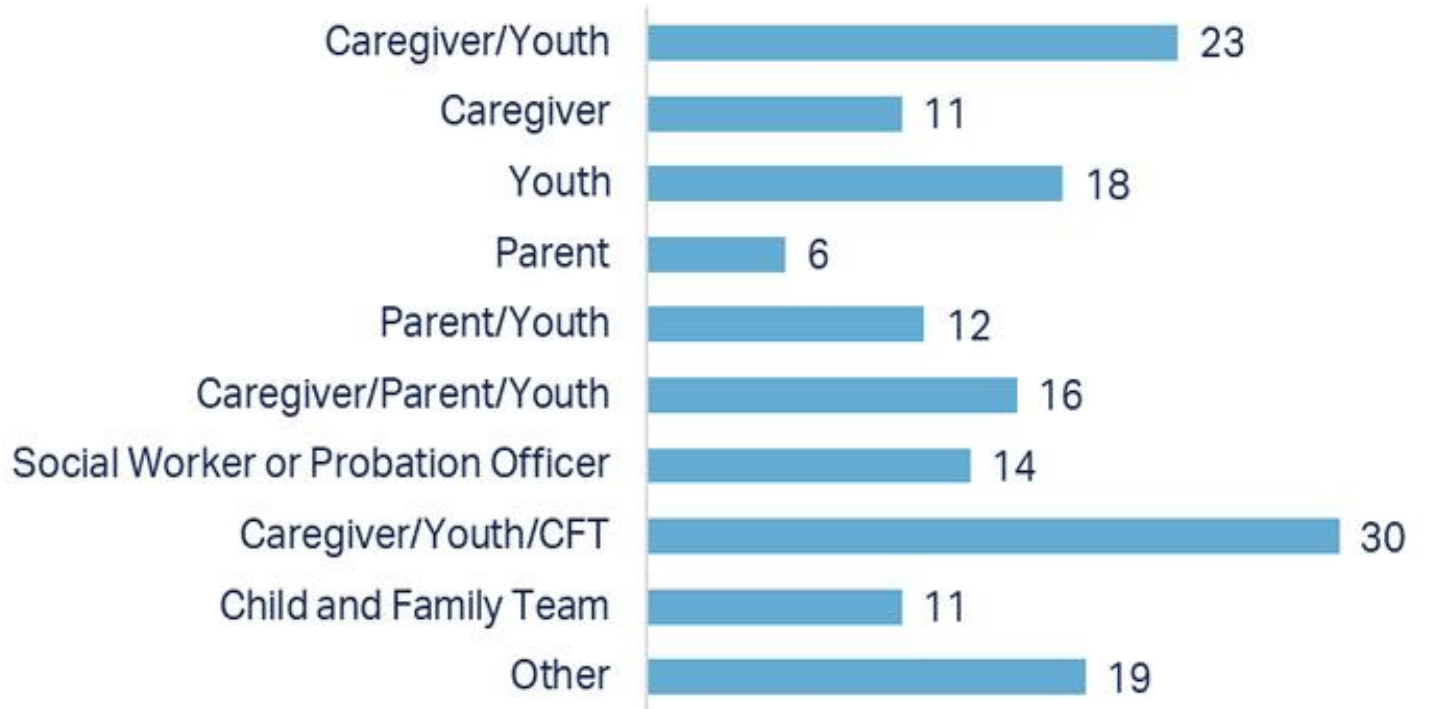
## Limitations and Potential Concerns

- Concern with frequency of meetings
- Concern for decision-making process



WHO SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR DETERMINING WHICH ACTIVITIES SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE STRENGTHS BUILDING SPENDING PLAN?

Respondents Urge Collaboration in Strength Building Decisions



# COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING

- Respondents overwhelmingly favored a collaborative approach when determining the activities included in the Strengths Building spending plan
- Consensus was decisions should be made jointly by caregivers and youth with significant input from parents, social workers, and the CFT
- Collaborative model is seen as essential to ensure that the chosen activities align with the child's or youth's interests, strengths, and developmental needs
- Importance of integrating multiple perspectives to tailor activities effectively to the youth's needs was a common theme

# CRITICAL CAREGIVER INFORMATION

## Clear Information about Funding Process

- Caregivers need straightforward guidance on how funding is allocated to ensure they can access necessary resources

## Outline of Eligible Activities

- Crucial to detail which activities qualify for funding to help caregivers focus their efforts appropriately

## Logistical Support is Necessary

- Providing logistical assistance, such as transportation or scheduling, helps caregivers manage their responsibilities effectively

## Step-by-Step Instructions are Essentials

- Detailed procedural instructions can empower caregivers to follow through with applications and participation smoothly

## Understanding Youth Needs and Benefits

- Need for caregivers to have detailed information about the child's or youth's interests, strengths, or growth goals

# CRITICAL YOUTH INFORMATION

## Funding Awareness

- Youth need to be informed about available options to access necessary resources

## Clear Access and Process

- Clear guidelines on available activities and clarity on the process for accessing funds must be well defined and transparent

## Role In Decision-Making

- Understanding their role in decision-making fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among youth

## Engagement Enhancement

- Enhancing engagement among youth is crucial for effective participation and utilization of resources



# FAMILY REUNIFICATION SUPPORT

## Joint Activities For Bonding

- Funding enhances family reunification through joint activities that foster bonding between the child or youth and their parent(s)

## Emotional and Behavioral Support

- Activities can help the build the child's or youth's self esteem and resiliency, which are crucial for emotional stability

## Holistic and Therapeutic Approaches

- Respondents suggested that funding could support holistic therapy methods and anger management programs, benefiting both the youth and their families

## Encouragement and Parental Support

- Parental encouragement to support and be present at their child's or youth's activities is crucial for building connections and supporting the child's or youth's development

## Long Term Assistance

- Importance of continuing Strengths Building activities post-reunification to ensure stability and ongoing development



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR



## Direct Payments to Providers

- Implementing direct payments can streamline transactions and improve provider relationships

## Flexible Payment Methods

- Offering various payment options can accommodate diverse provider needs and enhance satisfaction

## Rigorous Accountability Measures

- Establishing strict accountability protocols ensures transparency and builds trust among stakeholders

## Timely and Efficient Management of Funds

- Ensuring prompt fund management is essential for maximizing the impact for financial resources

# IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

## Key steps for successful implementation of Strengths Building funding

### Clear Communication is Essential

- Effective communication strategies are crucial for the successful implementation of Strengths Building funding

### Collaborative Decision-Making

- Involvement of all stakeholders is necessary to ensure everyone is aligned and engaged in the process

### Establish Effective Processes

- Developing streamlined processes will support the operational aspects of the funding initiative

### Address Stakeholder Concerns

- Listening and responding to stakeholders' concerns is crucial for the overall success of the funding

### Ensure Transparency

- Transparency in operations can significantly enhance trust and cooperation among all parties involved

### Enhance Well-Being of Children

- Ultimate goal is to significantly improve the well-being of children and youth in foster care

# ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

## Broadening Eligibility

- Expand the criteria to include older youth up to age 24 who still may need support after aging out of the system

## Unused Funds

- Unused funds should be designated for the child's or youth's college fund, ensuring long-term benefits for their education and future

## Focus on Youth Needs

- Holistic approach to empower youth and to benefit and participate in the program

## Concerns about CANS

- Several respondents expressed concerns about the reliability and validity of the IP-CANS assessment as a tool for determining needs



# RESOURCES

- [Closing the Extracurriculars Gap: Prioritizing Extracurricular Activities as a Key Intervention for Children and Youth in Foster Care and Juvenile Justice - YLC](#)
- [Assembly Bill 161 - Permanent Foster Care Rate Structure \(Chapter 46, Statutes of 2024\)](#)
- [The Permanent Foster Care Rate Structure Implementation Overview Webinar](#)
- [Integrated Core Practice Model](#)
- [CANS Assessment Tool](#)

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