

L.A. OPPORTUNITY  
YOUTH COLLABORATIVE

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2020

One Mission

One Collaborative

Boundless Opportunities



## **Our Mission**

Building multi-sector partnerships to improve education and employment outcomes for transition age foster youth to thrive.

## **Our Vision**

Transition age foster youth in Los Angeles County have the knowledge and skills to allow them to achieve economic mobility and flourish in their personal lives.

## **Our Partners**

Los Angeles Opportunity Youth Collaborative is a collaborative of over 70 partners from public agencies, community-based organizations, foundations, youth, education institutions, and employers.



*We support communities to come together to expand mobility, eliminate systemic barriers, and create their own solutions to their most pressing challenges. Throughout our history, we've done this work by focusing on supporting collaboration in communities, and on building community power and influence.*

– ASPEN INSTITUTE

## Who We Are

**The Los Angeles Opportunity Youth Collaborative (OYC)** brings together a multi-sector collaborative to address the systemic barriers facing transition age foster youth (“TAY”) in Los Angeles County.

The OYC was born in 2013 out of the Aspen Institute’s Opportunity Youth Forum, a national network of urban, rural, and tribal communities seeking to improve education and employment pathways for young people ages 16-24 who are disconnected from school and work. The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions sought to create a national model for improving outcomes for Opportunity Youth by investing in local collaboratives, rather than boutique programs, to develop community-driven and systemic solutions. The OYC adopted this model in L.A. County and focused its mission on implementing innovative, collaborative solutions for TAY, a sub-population of Opportunity Youth with unique barriers to achieving self-sufficiency.

The OYC, spearheaded by its backbone agency the Alliance for Children’s Rights, has built unprecedented trust and collaboration between public and private agencies to improve TAY education and employment outcomes. The inaugural campaign Foster Youth at Work was launched in 2014 by the OYC and examines TAY’s access to subsidized work experiences. It was convened by Unite-LA in partnership with LA County Workforce Development Community and Aging Services, LA City Economic Workforce Development Department and LA County Department of Children and Family Services. In 2015, the OYC then followed with the launch of the iFoster Jobs Program aimed at connecting TAY to employment. The OYC embarked on the Foster Youth College Advancement Project, in 2016, led by John Burton Advocates for Youth, to address TAY access to post-secondary education.



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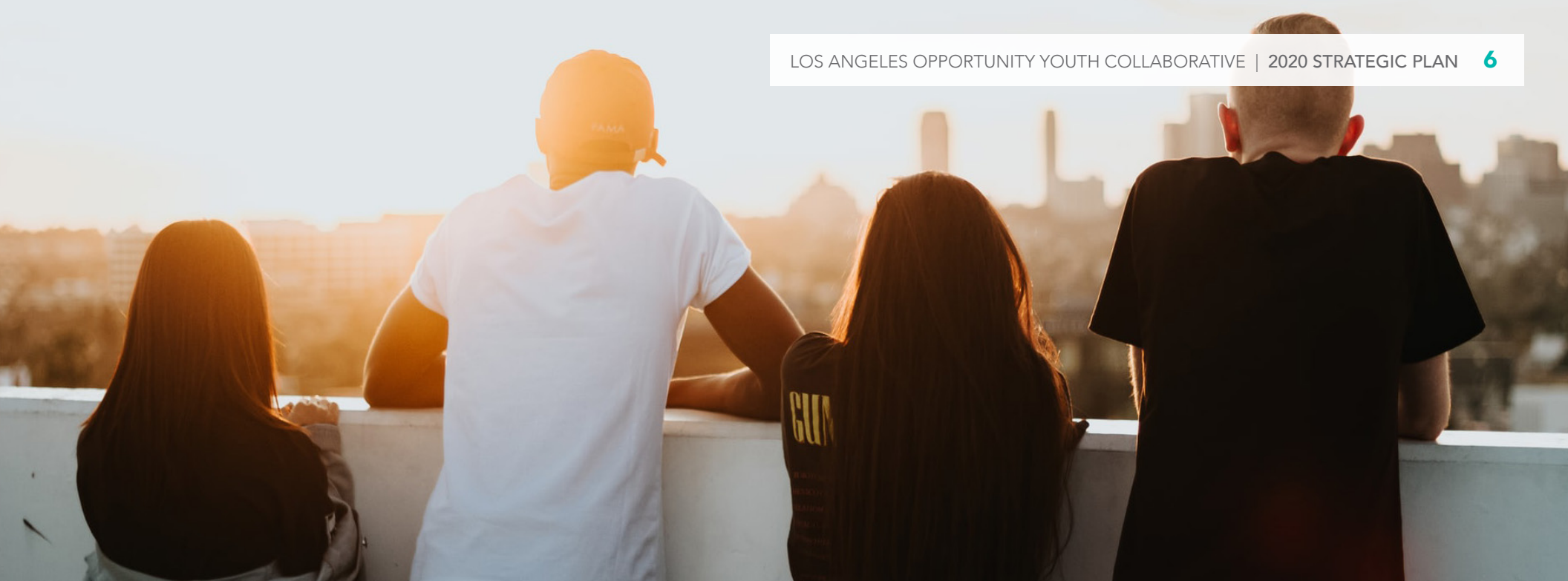
*The Opportunity Youth Collaborative is a profound example of how cross-sector partnerships can create innovation. When everyone contributes, working together in concert, we can ensure our transition age foster youth leave care with the resources, skills and ability to achieve their dreams.”*

– ANGELA PARKS-PYLES



**Today, the OYC is a collaboration of 70 partners** that includes public agencies, community-based organizations, educational institutions, philanthropic foundations, youth, and public and private employers. The structure of the collaborative is designed to encourage the OYC to be entrepreneurial and opportunistic in advancing its mission:

<b>STEWARDSHIP GROUP</b>	Defines the common agenda for OYC; advances and endorses the mission of the OYC within their organizations and within systems; identifies emerging opportunities for collaborative action; and tracks OYC's progress in achieving its strategic plan.	Executive Level Leaders
<b>BACKBONE AGENCY</b>	Facilitates the development of the common agenda; coordinates and communicates with co-conveners, partners, and stakeholders; evaluates progress towards the achievement of the OYC mission; and provides an annual reporting of the OYC activities and progress.	Alliance for Children's Rights
<b>CO-CONVENERS</b>	Each co-convener leads one or more collaboratives or workgroups designed to: achieve the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan; establish shared measurement practices; build public will; advances OYC policies; mobilize funding; and, promote alignment between the varying collaboratives and workgroups.	Alliance for Children's Rights, John Burton Advocates for Youth, iFoster and UNITE-LA
<b>YOUTH</b>	Young people are engaged in decision-making by initiating action within the collaborative and advocating on behalf of their peers.	The TAY community
<b>PARTNERS</b>	Agencies leading and participating in workgroups, involved in the implementation of core strategies, and providing services that contribute to the fulfillment of OYC's mission.	Cross-Sector Organizational Staff and Leaders



## What We Believe

We believe in the potential and value of our youth.

We envision a society in which all young people have equitable access and opportunity.

We believe systemic change is achieved by collaboration.

We are inclusive. We celebrate multiple approaches and points of view.

We believe diversity drives innovation, so we are building a culture where difference is valued.

We believe youth voice is vital to inform and inspire solutions.

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*The OYC gave me a clear perspective on how I can contribute. I started feeling like it was possible for me to do some real change.”*

**– DIMITRI DUNN (21), OYC YOUNG LEADER**

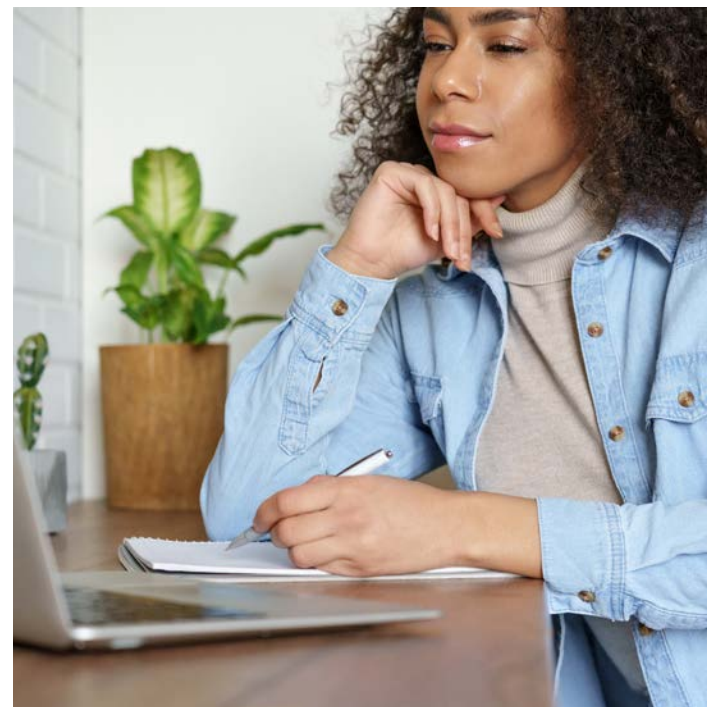


# Spotlight on Transition Age Foster Youth in L.A. County

Los Angeles County has the largest TAY population in the United States, home to 10,000 current and former foster youth, ages 14 to 24. Like their peers outside of the system, our youth have hope, want a good education, and dream of a fulfilling and meaningful life, but systemic barriers can impact their ability to achieve their ambitions.

Education, workforce development, and child welfare systems often lack the capacity to address the needs of TAY and, subsequently, our youth face a myriad of obstacles in navigating the bureaucracies intended to provide them support. These systemic barriers are frequently exacerbated by their personal experiences within the system. Many of our youth -- who are disproportionately black and brown -- experience placement instability, lack support from trusted adults, and are more likely to come from and live in under-resourced communities. As a consequence, many of our youth feel unprepared, unsupported, and disconnected.

At the same time, TAY are resilient and full of potential. Our collaborative is addressing systemic barriers so that our youth can achieve their dreams. If given the necessary supports, resources, and opportunities, TAY can make the transition to self-sufficiency. Changing the results for our youth is achieved by working collaboratively across sectors and alongside TAY to promote comprehensive solutions. Since the inception of the OYC, we have worked with our partners to make significant progress in re-imagining the nature of services provided to TAY.





## LESLIE'S STORY

**Leslie entered foster care for the first time when she was six, and then again when she was 16.**

In her household, violence and disruption were normalized, which led to a decline in her mental health and an overwhelming sense of hopelessness. For these reasons, Leslie realized she needed to separate herself from all unhealthy environments and relationships. By 17, she was living with a friend while finishing high school and troubled by the daunting journey ahead of her as she was about to enter her first year at Los Angeles Community College without permanent housing.

Leslie felt alone and unsupported her first semester of college, which made focusing on schoolwork exceedingly difficult and forcing her to take a break from student life. Luckily, that all changed her first semester back when she joined and started working for the LACC Guardian Scholars Program. Leslie had access to essential resources, as well as a community that made her feel visible. During her third year of college, Leslie had to move again, but this time around, she had the support and guidance of the LACC Guardian Scholars. After six years of not having a stable living situation, Leslie was able to move into New Economics for Women and live rent-free for two years as the Night Manager.

As Leslie began this new chapter of her life, a series of new obstacles surfaced. However, she felt secure and supported enough to reach out and ask for help. When she became the legal guardian of her niece, she reached out to the Alliance for Children's

Rights after being referred from Junior League, an all women's support group for former and current foster youth. The Alliance was able to help Leslie get in-touch with her nieces' lawyer. They also referred Leslie to Pathways LA for free daycare and A Sense of Home so she can get her apartment completely furnished for free. With assistance from a village of organizations, the crippling weight of financial and emotional stress was relieved.

Eventually, Leslie moved into her own apartment and participated in Bixel Exchange's Internship program, where she was exposed to various tech careers that sparked her interest in graphic design and public relations. It was through Bixel Exchange, where Leslie discovered the LA Opportunity Youth Collaborative's Youth Council.

Currently, Leslie is a member of the LA OYC 2019-2020 Youth Council, where she advocates for herself and other foster youth to shift policy and systems so future generations can reap the benefits of a more equitable workforce and educational system.

Leslie ultimately wants to foster kids and continue to help others because she understands the pain of not knowing who to ask for help. Throughout her journey, she always wanted structure and guidance, and when she finally received that, Leslie gained the strength and motivation to pursue a life beyond violence and disruption. Leslie found love and support and is a testament to the African proverb "it takes a village."





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*We must all believe in the capabilities and capacities of all of our young people, especially those in the foster care community. OYC, not only believes, but builds pathways for educational and professional success for all.”*

– **ROBERT SAINZ,**

ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER,

CITY OF LOS ANGELES ECONOMIC WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

# Our Goals



## High School Proficiency and Graduation

High school proficiency and graduation is a key predictor of, and often essential for, occupational success and positive social outcomes. With this new strategic focus, we will strive to ensure that our youth achieve educational equity in their high school experience, preparing them for post-secondary education and the workplace.

### OBJECTIVES:

- High School stability
- Grade-level proficiency
- High School graduation

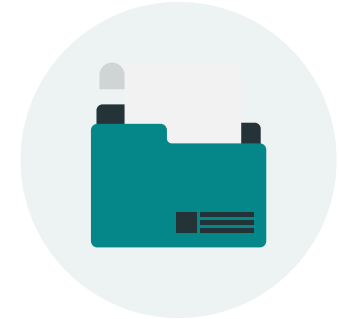


## Post-secondary Education, Persistence and Attainment

With a growing number of jobs requiring some form of post-secondary training, we seek to increase post-secondary enrollment, persistence, and completion rates for youth who have experienced foster care. Post-secondary education is the key to enabling youth who have experienced foster care to achieve long-term economic security whether it be career technical education, vocational training programs or a 2-year or 4-year college degree.

### OBJECTIVES:

- Financial aid application completion
- Direct post-secondary enrollment
- Post-secondary persistence
- Post-secondary completion



## Employment and a Thriving Career

For youth, a prosperous career often starts with pre-employment support, work readiness training, and meaningful work experience. Our goal is to provide youth who have experienced foster care a viable pathway to their long-term career goals.

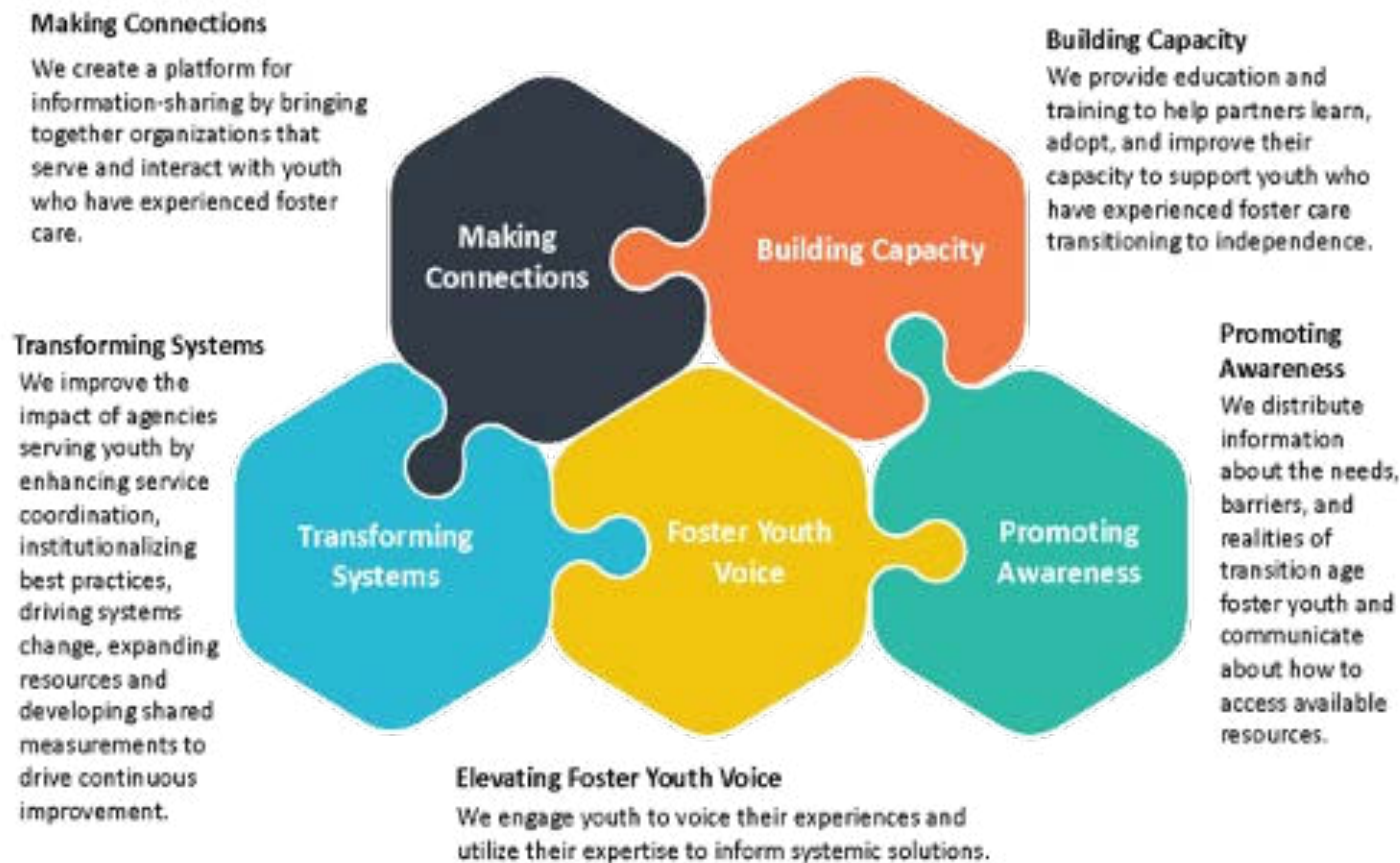
### OBJECTIVES:

- Work readiness training
- Early career exploration
- Work experience/Internships
- Apprenticeships
- Employment
- Employment retention
- Increasing wages



# Our Approach to Impact Change—Strategic Priorities

The OYC is building partnerships across sectors to improve education and employment outcomes for transition age foster youth. We work collaboratively with partners, including government agencies, education institutions, philanthropic and community-based organizations, youth and private sector employers. Utilizing the five strategic priorities below, we believe we can improve the systems designed to support TAY through a long-term and sustainable collective impact approach<sup>1</sup>:



<sup>1</sup> Appendix B provides a more detailed statement of our approach to collective impact.



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*The OYC unites the many and varied voices working to support our young people transitioning from foster care. Their collective power to affect change cannot be underestimated.”*

– KAREN BASS, CONGRESS MEMBER



## OYC Achievements and Success Stories

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In collaboration with partners, our policies and programs have positively impacted the education and career goals of more than

**7,500** transition age youth

supporting their pathways to high school graduation, college, and employment.

Some examples of our initiatives and success stories include:

**Transforming Systems**

**Building Capacity**

**Promoting Awareness**

**Elevating Youth Voice**

**Making Connections**



## Transforming Systems

### **Increased Access to Workforce Programs**

Established designated funding within L.A. County's Youth@Work program and streamlined enrollment verification documents, resulting in an 1000% increase in the number of youth in foster care who access the County's public workforce programming, Youth@Work: from 89 in 2014/14 to 872 in 2019/20.

Launched a universal referral process in 2019 between DCFS and over 40 public workforce programs in L.A. County to streamline outreach and access. The Universal Referral process led to the digitization of the referral process in November 2019 to track referral progress from enrollment through program completion.

Stewarded L.A. County's seven workforce boards in signing and now implementing a landmark agreement to ensure all foster and system-involved youth have 100 hours of work experience by age 16 and 300 hours by age 18.

### **Ensured That TAY Who Attend College Access Financial Aid**

The financial aid application rate for TAY high school seniors in L.A. County increased from 33% in 2018 to 61% in 2019, a rate higher than the general population. Also, developed the first-ever baseline data on financial aid completion rates in L.A. County.

### **Established Training Requirements for College Access**

Implemented a policy that requires DCFS caregivers who provide placement to youth between the ages of 12 to 19 to complete three hours of training on post-secondary education. Developed a training curriculum to be utilized both locally and statewide, in both English and Spanish, to implement this training.





## Building Capacity

### **Established the Platform for a Peer Navigation Program**

The OYC was the platform for bringing TAY AmeriCorps to Los Angeles and, in 2019, iFoster was awarded best new AmeriCorps Program award for TAY AmeriCorps.

### **Partnered in the Implementation of an Evidence-Based Work Readiness Curriculum**

The Transition Age Youth World of Work Curriculum, an evidence-based workforce development training curriculum developed in partnership by Columbia University and implemented by the TAY Collaborative, a partner of the OYC, is embedded into the public workforce system to train youth in work readiness including career exploration. In addition, LACOE, DCFS, Probation Department, and LAUSD all signed MOU's to use the curriculum.





## Promoting Awareness


**The OYC Resource Newsletter** has doubled in subscribers over the last two years and has an open rate exceeding the industry standard.

### **Partnered with LA County Board of Supervisors to Promote College Awareness**

Worked with the LA County Board of Supervisors to unanimously pass a board motion on post-secondary education support for our youth, which declared October “Foster Youth College Awareness Month.”

### **Advocated for Data Sharing Across Systems**

Partnered with Los Angeles Unified School District to participate in the first-ever data sharing mechanism within Cal-Pass Plus to track longitudinal college outcomes for our youth. This model was replicated in two additional school districts.



*"I don't want people to put me in a category or box and judge me just because I was in the foster care system."*

– TANEIL FRANKLIN (19), OYC YOUNG LEADER

## Elevating Youth Voice

### Created the OYC Youth Council

OYC Young Leaders are the go-to young adult experts on foster care. They participate in workgroups, inform policy, and are members of the DCFS Director's Council.

In January 2020, the Young Leader's advocacy increased the Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) funding from 8% to 18%, resulting in \$11.7 million dedicated to TAY housing and supports and was approved unanimously.

In July 2020, the Young Leaders provided testimony to support fully funding the Youth@Work program finding \$20.7 million in the supplemental budget to keep the program running, a plan that was unanimously approved.

## Making Connections

### Convened over 12,000 Professionals

Trained professional across various sectors on topics related to increasing post-secondary education attainment and work experience and employment opportunities for our youth.

# The Future of the OYC

As we look ahead, the OYC strives to expand our efforts to help prepare our youth for independence and prosperity. We will continue to focus on post-secondary education and workforce readiness, and we will also be embarking on a new course of action to provide our youth with a high school experience that better equips them for their future education and workforce goals.

Building on the foundation of current initiatives, this Strategic Plan sets forth a course of action for the future of the OYC that is intended to be dynamic, innovative and responsive to new opportunities. In Appendix A, we provide a more detailed blueprint for the achieving our mission by listing key strategies and objectives for each goal area. In Appendix B, we set forth our approach to collective impact designed to address the education and career needs of the TAY community by elevating TAY voice within the system, promoting and nurturing relationships among public, private and community-based organizations that are critical to finding long-term solutions.

