



FR1ENDS of the
CH1LDREN

Generational Change,
One Child at a Time

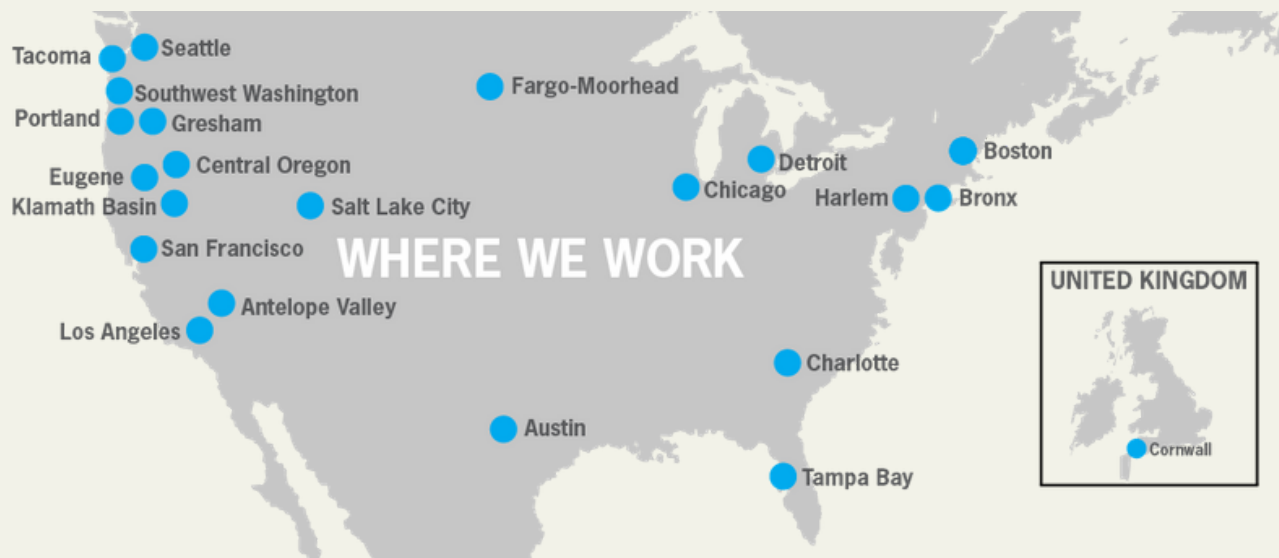
Our Two-Generation Impact:
Advancing Equitable Family Well-being,
Mental Health, and Education Outcomes

Summary of Findings:

Friends of the Children is an equity-based, social innovation driven by youth and caregiver voice with decades of proven impact. As we strive as a nation to create opportunity for all, this report offers evidence that Friends of the Children – a program that uses paid, professional mentors (Friends) who sustain relationships with youth and families over 12+ years – has a two-generation (2Gen) impact, positively impacting both youth and caregiver outcomes that improve family well-being, mental health and school success.

ABOUT US

Friends of the Children is a nearly three-decades old, youth-serving nonprofit. The organization currently operates in 22 locations across the country and in the U.K.



Like all children, the youth Friends of the Children serves have unique talents, varied interests and big dreams. Unlike other programs, we exclusively focus on children who are also facing complex and intersecting systemic barriers. Children who have experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) by the time they reach kindergarten. Children whose families have been impacted by the foster care and the criminal justice systems. Children who mostly identify as children of color (88%). We hire and train paid, professional mentors called Friends whose full-time jobs are to support youth to succeed. Each child has a Friend from as early as age 4 through high school graduation—12+ years, no matter what.

Reflecting on the challenges our families face and our mission to impact generational change, Friends of the Children is updating the way we work. We see greater potential for youth empowerment when we support entire families by also connecting caregivers to their own supports, empowering them as they work to achieve their own goals for themselves and their families. We call this our 2Gen approach.

WHAT IS 2GEN?

Two-generation (2Gen) approaches build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives together. As children, parents, and families grow and change across their lifespan, 2Gen approaches align opportunities to help families pursue their goals and thrive, optimizing each person's potential along the way. The results are healthy children meeting developmental milestones, healthy parents with family-supporting jobs, and better-connected individuals able to participate in civic and family life.



Source: Ascend at Aspen Institute

COVID-19 Impact on Families

Friends of the Children has been working to support families to move from poverty to prosperity for almost three decades. Economic experts locate the source of poverty in policies, not people. Sadly, many entrenched policies – now compounded by the pandemic – are widening disparities rather than narrowing them.

We know this first-hand: 88% of Friends of the Children youth and families identify as people of color. For them, health and economic disparities have only been magnified during the current crisis. For many reasons – work schedules, existing health concerns, lack of culturally responsive services and mistrust – youth and families in our program struggle to access services.

Since March 2020, Friends of the Children has seen a more than 300% increase in demand for services as well as the need for connectivity to distance learning, mental health support, and other critical stabilizing resources.

DECADES OF PROVEN RESULTS FOR YOUTH

The Friends of the Children model is distinct, courageous and proven. We redefined youth mentoring by creating the first and only long-term professional mentoring program in the country. Friends are experts in building sustained and nurturing relationships with youth. Our program is evidence-informed and research-based, and we have proven long-term outcomes.

Even with increased demand for services and the need to continuously innovate and enhance our service delivery during COVID-19, Friends of the Children is getting results.



FACTS ABOUT OUR FRIENDS

- 60% are people of color
- All have college degrees and 2-3 years of youth development experience
- All go through 40-hours of intensive New Friends Training
- All receive ongoing professional development in evidence-based approaches that support trauma-informed, culturally-responsive practices
- The average tenure of a Friend is 5+ years

Across the 12+ years youth are in the program, Friends track data on intermediate outcomes such as social emotional development, school success, improved health, making good choices, and building plans and skills for the future. These intermediate outcomes support youth to reach their goals and set them up to enter adulthood and the workforce with a solid foundation for future success, with more choices and opportunities. Ultimately, what youth gain through the skills they build in our program leads to higher wages, better health and brighter futures. Every \$1 invested in our program returns \$7 to the community, according to the Harvard Business School Association of Oregon.

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES DATA FROM 2019-20:

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

95% of youth made progress on social and emotional development, such as asking for help from a caring adult, practicing healthy ways to cope with stress and building relationships with Friends and adults who provide social support and connections to resources.

PLANS AND SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

93% of youth made progress on attaining skills for safety and independence, setting short and long-term goals and monitoring progress towards them.

SCHOOL SUCCESS

95% of youth made progress toward school success, such as finishing homework, regularly attending school or staying focused in the classroom.

OUR PROGRAM GRADUATES:

92% of youth go on to enroll in post-secondary education, serve our country or enter the workforce.



83% of youth receive their high school diploma or GED.



93% of youth remain free from involvement in the juvenile justice system.



98% of youth wait to parent until after their teen years.



Family-Led Model Innovation

For years Friends of the Children has known that, in addition to life-changing outcomes for youth, the presence of a Friend in a child's life has multiplier effects for their parents, caregivers, siblings and communities. We wanted to hear directly from caregivers themselves about how they benefitted from having a Friend in their lives and what we could do better.

In 2017 we asked researchers at the University of Washington to conduct a qualitative study involving caregivers of Friends' youth impacted by the child welfare system. Funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, caregiver focus groups at three Friends of the Children locations found that our program positively impacted their families in the following ways:

- Knowledge and skill building through strengthening social-emotional skills that promote positive behavior and family stability.
- Relational support by providing role models, along with consistency and stability.
- Advocating for and connecting with families by empowering them with tools to navigate complex systems, connect with needed services and supports and build connections among providers and stakeholders in families' lives.
- Leveraging community support which is useful for navigating crises and connecting families with resources.

These findings amplified early results from our longitudinal randomized controlled trial, which found positive youth and family-focused outcomes. By participating in Friends, youth strengthened social-emotional skills, and caregivers developed a more positive perception of their children's behavior, one of several parental protective factors recognized as increasing family health and well-being.

Codifying Our Two-Generation Approach

Leveraging those Caregiver Study findings, Friends of the Children has codified our 2Gen approach, leveraging the power of the long-term, youth-centered focus of the Friend relationship to amplify work with caregivers. Through our 2Gen approach, caregivers tell us how they define success and the challenges they'd like to overcome to advance their family's well-being.

In support of their work with youth and families, Friends are trained to:

- SUPPORT caregivers to understand their child's needs and strengths.
- EQUIP caregivers with social and emotional learning skills.
- PROMOTE self-advocacy through an understanding of, and advocacy within, complex systems like education and child welfare.
- CONNECT families to concrete supports, like housing and education/employment pathways.
- CREATE opportunities to build social capital through community and peer-to-peer connections.

By tapping into the inherent strength and resilience of our caregivers, Friends support them to recognize themselves as their child's greatest resource.

Overall, whatever I'm trying to accomplish our Friend supports me and gives me great advice to succeed."

Caregiver



2GEN IMPACT: CAREGIVER SURVEY FINDINGS

In 2020, independent researchers from ICF surveyed caregivers about how the program has affected their lives and the lives of their children:*

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.

84%

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

91%

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

92%

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.

**All data representative of caregivers who responded to the survey.*

Connecting to Concrete Supports

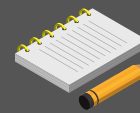
The families Friends of the Children serves often struggle or are reluctant to access resources. When caregivers enter our program, about half are working and about one in five have an annual income of \$5,000 or less while 50% earn \$20,000 or less. To improve family stability while supporting youth and caregivers to work toward longer-term goals, Friends connect families to concrete supports – things like:**



Educational assistance, like books for your home, tutoring or library access



Food assistance programs (WIC, SNAP–food stamps)



Parenting programs or classes



Cultural or art activities



Childcare



Income assistance (e.g., TANF, unemployment)



Fitness or sports activities



Mental health care, like counseling, therapy sessions, or medication



Housing assistance (e.g., Section 8)

***Caregiver Survey Findings: Programs or Services Received*

QUOTES FROM OUR CAREGIVER SURVEY

"Two years ago, I attended [STATE] college after a long conversation with [my child's Friend]. Now I'm just waiting for this COVID-19 situation to pass to finish school. My son is so proud of me."

"My child's mentor has helped me understand certain behaviors in my child and given me ideas and tools on how to address issues and behaviors that arise."

"Friends of the Children has helped me understand my son more and his needs. I am having better communication with my son thanks to Friends of the Children. My son was always in trouble in school, but he has learned from Friends of the Children and is totally a different child now. Friends of the Children made a big impact on our family thank you guys so much."

"Friends of the Children always blesses my child to help build his passion. Friends of the Children has helped my child open up and speak freely of his emotions knowing it is ok. Friends of the Children has done a lot for my family and child in a year than I have tried to do on my own."

"Friends of the Children has made me a better person. I think positive now. When you think your life is hard and you're all alone that's not true. Friends of the Children helped me think positive and I now push for my goals to better my life and my kid's life. Friends of the Children will guide my son to a better future."

"Friends of the Children are our family friends. It is a community that rallies up around my whole family and are there in times of joy, needs, and all that is in between. My child and our family are much better because we have them in our life. What I love the most is that although only one person is assigned to my child, we have a team, and extension to our family. It's nice to walk into a room where people not only know my child but also know our names."

[Read the full copy of the 2020 Friends of the Children Caregiver Survey Report.](#)

POLICY IMPLICATIONS – THE PATH FORWARD

Embracing a 2Gen approach requires not just a shift in thinking, but also a shift in policy and practice that empowers caregivers as experts and decision-makers while also embracing outcomes-focused innovation. Friends of the Children’s 2Gen approach does both, positively impacting family well-being, mental health, and school success.

Building an Equitable Family Well-being System

Our Vision: As we advocate for reform of the existing child welfare system, our vision is that Friends of the Children becomes part of something new – an equitable family well-being system that mitigates trauma, redresses long-standing power imbalances, and maximizes the potential of all youth and families.

Our relationship-based approach, lasting longer than most programs, is challenging public systems to think beyond short-term, transactional approaches to get sustainable results. Youth and families impacted by the child welfare system experience steep challenges to their success. Together with systemic and institutional racism, the lack of access to culturally-responsive trauma mitigation supports for youth and families of color has contributed to the disproportionate impact that system has had on the communities of color.

Friends of the Children’s track record of positive impact serving youth and caregivers that are highly at risk of—or who already have been impacted by—the foster care system is of increasing interest as an effective foster care prevention and intervention strategy.

Findings from the Caregiver Study found that 30% of our caregivers were in foster care as a child and 60% of them aged out of care as adults. In a related exploratory outcome study, children selected into Friends from foster care experienced significantly shorter lengths of stay in care than a comparison group of children.

Across the country, we have established and are growing partnerships with state and county child welfare and mental health departments to promote safe and stable families and prevent entry into the child welfare system. In three locations, we focus on serving families in which the caregivers themselves experienced or aged out of the foster care system. In others, we focus on serving children and caregivers who have already come to the attention of the child welfare system and are working to keep their families safely at home together. We also partner with the Court Appointed Special Advocate program in support of families being reunified to avoid re-entry into care.

“The Friend relationship provides an avenue for promoting family stability, permanence and child well-being by providing holistic support to child welfare system-involved caregivers, families and children,” said lead author of Friends’ Caregiver Study, Amy M. Salazar, M.S.W., Ph.D., Assistant Professor at Washington State University Vancouver Department of Human Development.

Promoting Resiliency, Belonging and Improved Mental Health

Our Vision: Improve mental health through the power of intentional, long-term relationships with Friends who are trauma-informed and culturally responsive. Friends support coordination across systems, promote access to services and are trained to empower resiliency in youth and caregivers in support of improved mental health.

In 2019, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released a groundbreaking report that looked at the best available evidence regarding how to prevent and interrupt Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). The research showed that a stunning one in six adults has experienced four or more types of ACEs. The CDC report also emphasized the importance of relationships with caring adults and named the practice of mentoring and positive parenting supports as approaches that prevent and lessen the impact of childhood trauma. The report also linked connectedness (belonging, or social capital) to building resiliency in the face of adversity.

Our 2Gen work prioritizes building social capital for youth and caregivers, including peer-to-peer and community supports that promote hope and belonging. Studies show that having hope for the future helps build resilience—the ability to get through tough times and recover more quickly from setbacks. Moreover, hope can help ward off or reduce anxiety, trauma and depression.

Lack of access to culturally responsive behavioral health supports for healing from trauma is a significant issue for the families Friends of the Children serves. Our 2Gen work also prioritizes partnership with behavioral health service providers to reduce stigma and ensure that youth and caregivers have access to trauma-informed mental health services. Friends are also equipped with a wide range of teaching, counseling and advocacy skills so that they can work closely with mental health and education service professionals to ensure each child and family receives the individualized services they need to heal and thrive.



“Friends of the Children provides a consistent, long-term, caring adult to children who need it. The program is part of our prevention service continuum, engineered to protect and support the mental health and well-being of LA County children and families. ”

Jonathan E. Sherin, M.D., Ph.D., Director of the LA County Department of Mental Health

“As a licensed social worker on the front lines of rural mental health, I fully support Friends of the Children’s efforts to fill gaps in mental health care, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Heidi Gaither, MSW, CSWA, Klamath County Developmental Disabilities Services

Supporting Education Outcomes – for Youth and Caregivers

Our Vision: Schools recognize that community-based, whole-child approaches – like Friends of the Children – advance equity and achievement in education and engage caregivers as education partners. Feeling empowered and equipped, caregivers are inspired to advance their own learning and career advancement goals.

The youth we serve need and deserve to have access to a quality education. Every year, youth we serve set goals that will advance their school success – everything from improved attendance and better grades to making new friends and participating in extracurricular activities. Friends partner with more than 550 schools across the country to ensure the youth we serve have equal access to learning opportunities.

Two long-term outcomes for our 2Gen work with caregivers relate to school success: 1) caregivers feel supported as they engage as advocates for their children’s individual learning needs; and 2) caregivers achieve the goals they set for their family’s stability. Many of our caregivers feel let down or misunderstood and have a general lack of trust in the education system. The majority did not have the supports they needed to go on to college and 50% did not have the supports they needed to finish high school.

Friends build bridges between schools and caregivers; sitting in on parent-teacher conferences and helping parents navigate the complexities of the education system. As caregivers share with us their personal goals, we create intentional partnerships with post-secondary institutions, creating pathways for parents to advance their own education and career opportunities.



FRIENDS AND CAREGIVERS: TOGETHER WE PUT CHILDREN FIRST

My name is Kiyana, and my daughter Kamara has been a part of Friends of the Children–Boston for the last six years.

I grew up with a hardworking mom who always told me to not depend on anyone, work hard and put family first. Because of that, I was always very driven and goal oriented and when I became a mother, I made a commitment to always put my children first. I have big dreams for myself and for my children. And even on the worst of days, I never lose focus.

There have been up's and down's in my life. I survived abusive relationships, job losses and homelessness. I often think back to how my children and I have been able to get through the tough times – Friends of the Children–Boston was by our side for so many of those challenges.

Friends–Boston [has been] true to their word – they have been there for us for the last six years. Kamara's mentor, Mary Kate, has been with her for five years now. She is so consistent and patient with her, and understands what Kamara needs in order to succeed. She knew that Kamara had a hard time trusting people, but she never stopped trying. Now, she is one of few people Kamara trusts to help her. With Mary Kate's help, Kamara learned to use words to express her frustrations, and is now more confident in herself. She is doing so well in school and looks forward to seeing Mary Kate every week.

Mary Kate has also been there for me through some tough times over the last few years. We were evicted from our last apartment and the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF) got involved. My girls had to be put in foster care while I found housing for us. Mary Kate went to all of the court dates and meetings with me, and she encouraged me when I felt frustrated. When my girls were in foster care and I couldn't see them, she showed up every week to see Kamara and her sister making sure that they were okay. She was an advocate for our family in front of DCF and made sure that I was supported when I got back on track.

Mary Kate and Friends of the Children–Boston are my partners in making sure my children succeed. And because of their support of our entire family, I can continue to focus on my personal goals. I am very proud to say that I have been able to continue my education, and if all goes well, I will graduate with my Associate's Degree in Business Management from Southern New Hampshire University before the end of the summer. The work that Friends–Boston is doing is helping our entire family.

I believe we all have a responsibility to give back. I work hard to be a good example for my three children, and I now try to give back and help other people who might have the same struggles we had. And I know no matter what happens in the future, Friends of the Children–Boston will continue to be there for me and my family, and Mary Kate will always be someone Kamara can turn to.

TAKEAWAYS

Caregivers have told us that what they need to achieve their hopes and dreams are people who believe in their power, potential and contributions. They've told us that having trusting, long-term relationships with Friends empowers change across generations – for both themselves and their children.

As we work together to break down barriers between all people and opportunity in America, the Friends of the Children 2Gen approach is an effective solution for children and families facing the greatest barriers. Leaders across sectors – child welfare, mental health and education – have identified Friends of the Children both as an alternative and an addition to their service continuum.

By empowering families as experts and supporting the inherent resiliency of children and youth, Friends of the Children's 2Gen approach:

- Supports parents to better understand their child's needs/strengths;
- Strengthens family relationships and well-being;
- Empowers caregivers to effectively engage as education partners with schools;
- And improves family stability through concrete supports and enhanced community connections.

Friends of the Children advances youth, caregiver and systems-level impacts. Policy makers and cross-sector partners concerned with family well-being, mental health, education and equity should consider opportunities to implement and scale the Friends of the Children 2Gen approach in more communities across the country.

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



SPECIAL THANKS TO:



The Aspen Institute is a global nonprofit organization committed to realizing a free, just and equitable society. Founded in 1949, the Institute drives change through dialogue, leadership and action to help solve the most important challenges facing the United States and the world. Headquarters in Washington, DC, the Institute has a campus in Aspen, Colorado and an international network of partners.



Ascend at the Aspen Institute is the national hub for breakthrough ideas and collaborations that move children and their parents toward educational success, economic security, and health and well-being. We embrace a commitment to racial equality and a gender lens.

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ABOUT FRIENDS OF THE CHILDREN

Friends of the Children is a national nonprofit with the mission of impacting generational change by empowering youth who are facing the greatest obstacles through relationships with professional mentors – 12+ years, no matter what. Our successful model is now in 22 locations across the country and in Cornwall, U.K. Our work has been featured in The New York Times, Stanford Social Innovation Review and CBS News. Learn more at friendsofthechildren.org or contact us at info@friendsofthechildren.org.