

# Improving Child Welfare Systems

**SECRETARIES' INNOVATION GROUP**

DECEMBER 4, 2025



©2025 Youth Villages, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Welcome

- About Youth Villages
- The current landscape
- **Three** actionable steps to improve systems
- Q+A



# Significant Moments in our History

**1980** Patrick Lawler begins work at Dogwood Village

**1986**

Founded with the merger of two Memphis-based residential campuses

**1994**

In-home services launched in Tennessee

**1999**

Youth Villages begins serving youth aging out of foster care with LifeSet

**2015**

MDRC releases one-year evaluation of LifeSet, showing improved outcomes for youth aging out of care

**2016**

First provider partnership begins; growing to 31 partners in 2025

**2018**

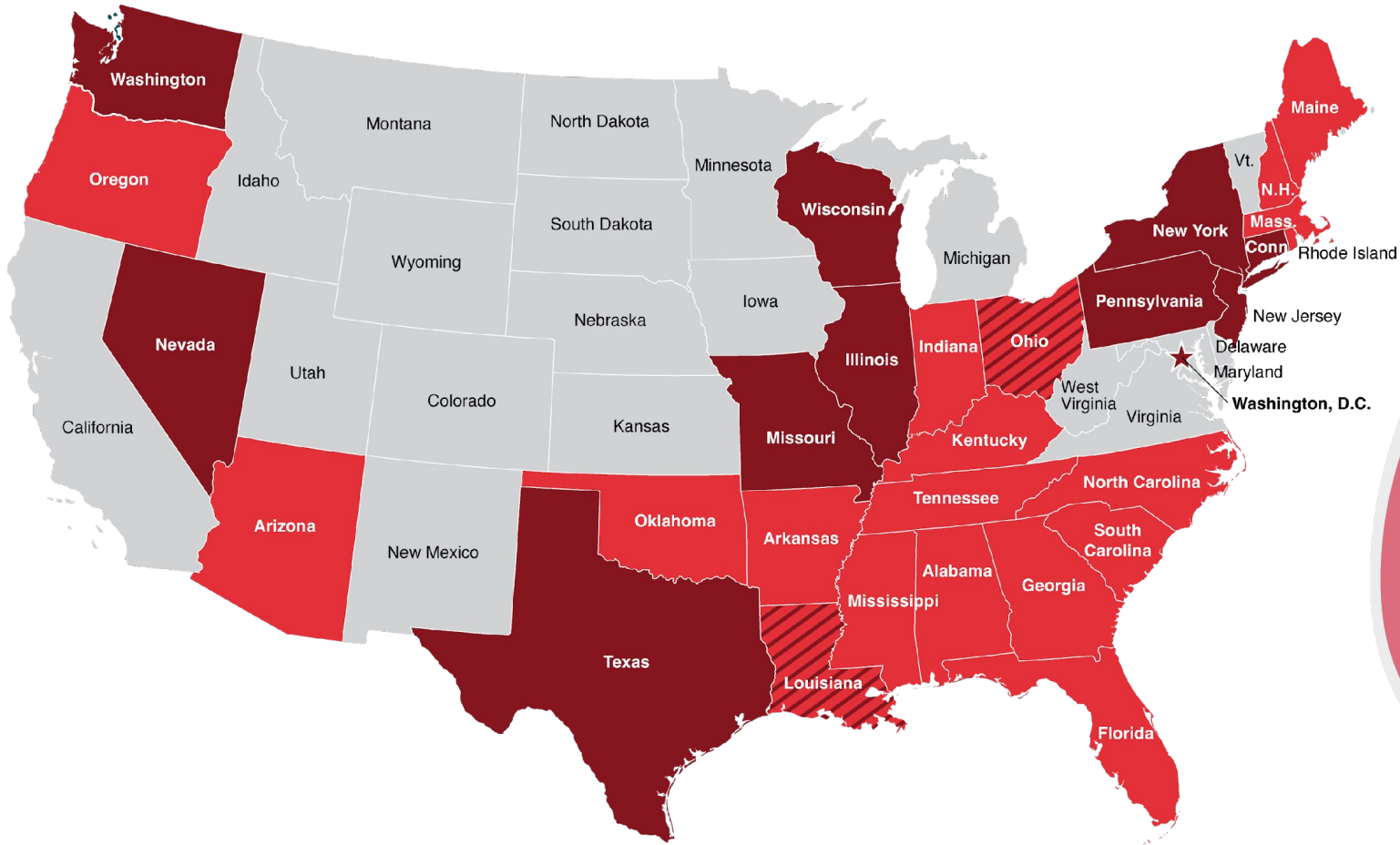
New Allies launches

**2022**

Intercept earns "well-supported" from Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse



# Youth Villages National Footprint

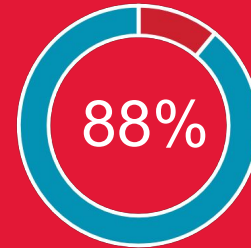


- Light Red: Youth Villages staff deliver services
- Dark Red: Youth Villages' services delivered through partner agencies

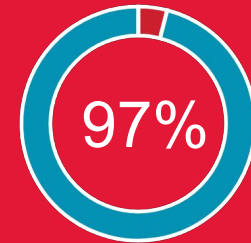
Louisiana and Ohio serve children and families through both partnerships and direct services.

- 5,000 staff nationwide; 123 locations in 29 states and D.C.

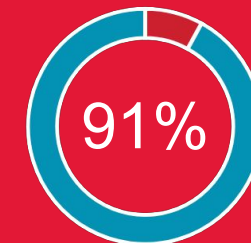
- 13,000 children and families daily (only 500 in residential); 47,000+ annually



**Living successfully**  
*With family or independently*



**In school, graduated or earning GED**



**No involvement with the law**  
*Within the follow-up period*



## Ongoing Challenges

**Budget & Finances**

**Juvenile Court**

**Judges  
Child Safety**

**Concerns  
Lack of Residential  
Placements**

**Providers**

**Legislative  
Pressure  
Staff Challenges**

**Legal  
Matters/Lawsuits  
Need for Foster Parents**

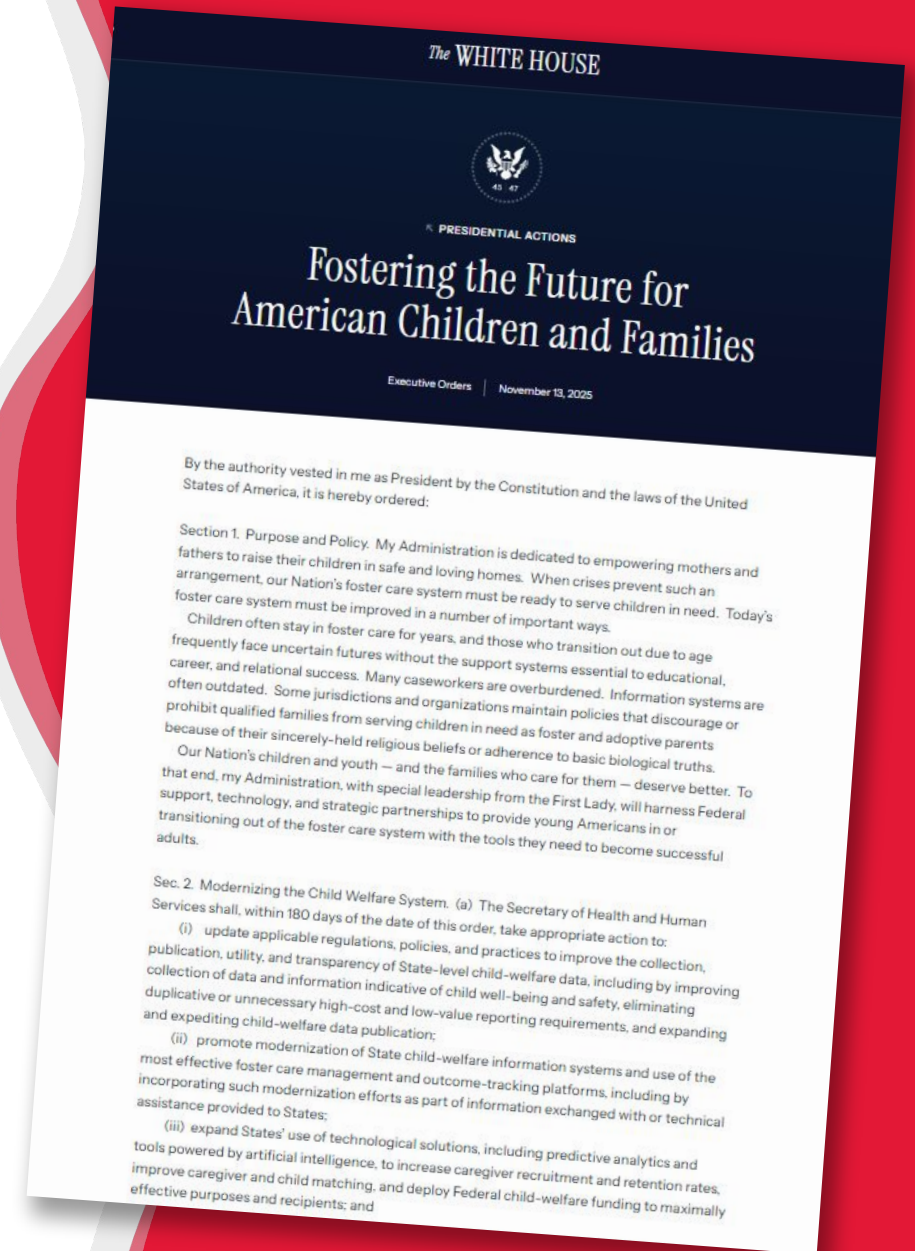
**Kids Sleeping in Offices  
and Hotels  
Uncertainty**

# The State of Child Welfare

November 13, 2025: Executive Order - **child welfare is a nationwide, cross-system priority**

## Some highlights:

- Expanding use of data and evidence to reduce time in care and unnecessary placements, support families and youth aging out of care
- Increasing education and workforce development opportunities
- Supports youth aging out of foster care
- Requires cross-agency collaborations
- Creating conversations in the federal government to advocate for what is needed to transform systems



# The State of Child Welfare

November 2025: Confirmation of Alex Adams as Assistant Secretary at Administration for Children and Families

*“This is a moment of opportunity. With leadership from the president and first lady, **we can transform the child welfare system to one that is family-centered, data-driven, and results-focused.** We can clear away the clutter and **give states flexibility** to truly focus on their highest order needs.”*

*- Alex Adams*





# How Can States Improve Child Welfare Systems?





# Create a Strong Agency Culture



# Mission-centered culture

## Our Mission & Values:

**To help children and families live successfully.**

Kids' needs come first always.

Children are raised best by their families.

We provide a safe place.

We strive to achieve positive, lasting results.

We are committed to our staff.

We are each responsible for providing the highest level of service to our customers.

We constantly improve our performance to achieve excellence.



## ▶ Building strong cultures that make a meaningful impact

- Assemble a strong leadership team
  - Your time and attention are valuable; prioritize what is most important, and delegate when possible.
- Plan for the future
  - Build a strategic plan with clearly defined goals and a roadmap to reach them
- Construct a culture of urgency centered around supporting families





# Make Evidence-Based Decisions



# Use Evidence to Make Decisions

## Measure Outcomes

- Keep Score (Scorecards)
  - Know who is doing well and who is not
  - What is going well and not going well

## Hold Providers Accountable

- Have honest problem-solving conversations with your providers
- Have a mechanism to direct referrals and contracts to those getting the best outcomes

## Utilize Chapin Hall's Data Center and Map2Impact

*(a new Youth Villages-  
Chapin Hall partnership)*

Analyzes state data and presents as evidence  
to **inform decisions**

**Partner with providers,  
private funders, young  
people and the Federal  
Government**





# Partner with Your Providers ...

... and incentivize them to provide the types of services you most need, to the children and families who most need the services.

## Rates that support provider's costs

High quality services are expensive

## Rate structures are important

Keep it simple

## Consider the ROI

Prioritize providers that yield the best outcomes vs. those that are cheapest

## Consider rewarding for outcomes

Develop creative ways to incentivize the best providers





# Partner with Private Funders

*Find philanthropists in your state who care about this work*

Youth Villages' partnership with Blue Meridian Partners allows us to create public/private partnerships to better support state child welfare systems, young people aging out of care, and families who need services and support to prevent their children from going into foster care.



**Funding for  
LifeSet, Intercept  
and technical  
assistance**

for systems and  
practice change  
support



**We have granted  
over \$34M**

in direct matching  
grants to stand up  
LifeSet and support  
Intercept scaling in  
17 states.



**We have an open  
round of  
applications right  
now**

for private funding to  
support LifeSet and  
Intercept scaling.

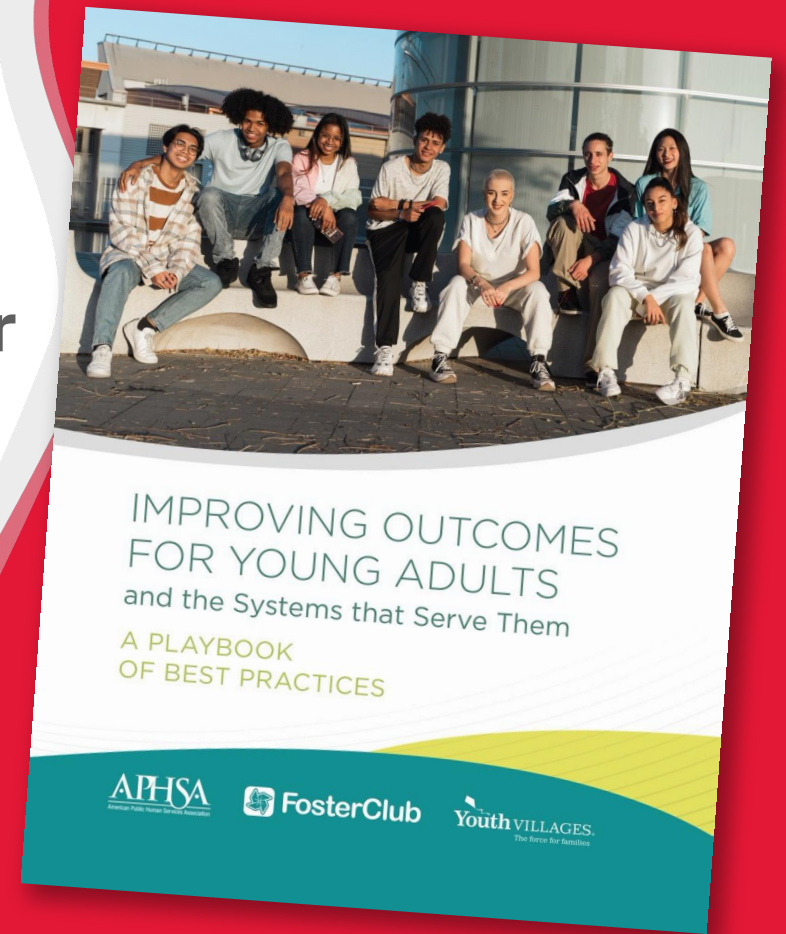


# Partner with Young People

- Ask them! Listen to youth aging out in your state
- Consider extending foster care in your state
- Check out the Playbook:
  - A road map for child welfare agencies, policymakers and advocates who are committed to improving outcomes for young people who turn 18 in foster care
  - Co-designed with young people with lived



FosterClub



Read the  
Playbook





# **Partner with the Federal Government to Maximize Federal Funding Opportunities**

**Family First  
Prevention Services Act**

**Chafee & ETV  
Funds**

**Medicaid**



**Q&A**

**Thank You**

Pat.Lawler@YouthVillages.  
org

