

Case for Support

PLC Delivers a More Promising Future for DC and Maryland



Together, we transform the lives of individuals and families, we strengthen communities, and we combat systemic racism in child welfare.



**PROGRESSIVE
LIFE CENTER, INC**
for children and families

**Serving the
District of Columbia,
Maryland, Pennsylvania
and Delaware.**

About PLC



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For nearly 40-years, Progressive Life Center (PLC) has enhanced the lives of vulnerable children, youth, and families by providing human services that meet psychological, spiritual, and cultural needs. Our work has included juvenile justice, child welfare, behavioral health, and domestic violence prevention programming in Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia.

Building on our expertise in serving majority BIPOC (Black, indigenous, and people of color) children, youth and families, and our enduring commitment to racial and social justice, we are launching a new initiative to fulfill myriad unmet needs of children and young adults in the child welfare system - and their families, while also addressing the root systemic inequities in our country's child welfare system that disproportionately impact families of color.

Guided by our unique, culturally responsive clinical approach, PLC is ensuring highest quality support for the children we serve in majority Black communities in Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia. Through our family preservation and kinship care programs, we are building stronger families to ensure children are safe and remain in place. For children and youth who come to us already engaged in the foster care system, we continue to make family reunification - when in the child's best interest - a priority. Through our independent living program for youth ages 16-21 who are transitioning out of foster care, we educate, empower and support them through their journey in becoming independent, connected and valued members of their community. And as we expand our programming in collaboration with regional partners, we will provide intensive support to youth - beginning in middle school - on a journey of trauma resolution, academic excellence, and career success.

Our Work Includes

Foster Care: As a licensed foster care provider, we recruit, train and license foster parents; develop and manage child profiles; support the placement of children and youth in concert with local social services; and provide ongoing training and support to foster parents. In Pennsylvania, we also support adoptions.

Domestic Violence Education and Prevention: PLC educates African American faith leaders and the general public to recognize signs of domestic violence and understand how to become proactive in prevention.

Family Preservation: With a priority of child safety, our staff works with the entire family to help overcome crisis and prevent future crises.

Kinship Care: For family members who are caring for a child or children because the biological parents are unable, PLC offers an array of comprehensive supports.

Semi-Independent Living: We support the transition of foster youth to independence.

After School and Summer Camp: In a positive youth development framework, we offer a variety of programs for children and teens teaching them to work together and make thoughtful decisions.

Parenting Classes: Virtually and in-person, our efforts heal families by educating parents in positive parenting techniques.

See our full array of programs and learn more at ProgressiveLifeCenter.org



Systemic Racism in the Child Welfare System

Our country is in the midst of a racial reckoning, as we confront the ways in which minorities have been harmed by neglect and oppression in our educational, carceral, healthcare, and economic systems. The U.S. child welfare system, which purportedly exists to protect children, has its own legacy of systemic racism that has in many ways victimized generations of Black children and their families.



This is the reality: **Black children are 1.5 times more likely to be placed in foster care** than their non-Black peers. In 2018, Black children represented 14% of the United States' total child population, but 23% of all children in foster care!ⁱ A recent study revealed that a shocking 37% of U.S. children have experienced a child protective services investigation by the age of 18, with the higher rate of 53% for African American children.ⁱⁱ COVID-19 exacerbated racial inequities in the child welfare system – particularly for Black and multiracial children, youth and families.ⁱⁱⁱ

Once in the system, **Black children spend more time in care than others and are less likely to be reunited with their families!**ⁱ The causes for these racial disparities are wide ranging, and include local demographics, casework practices, racial bias, and politics.

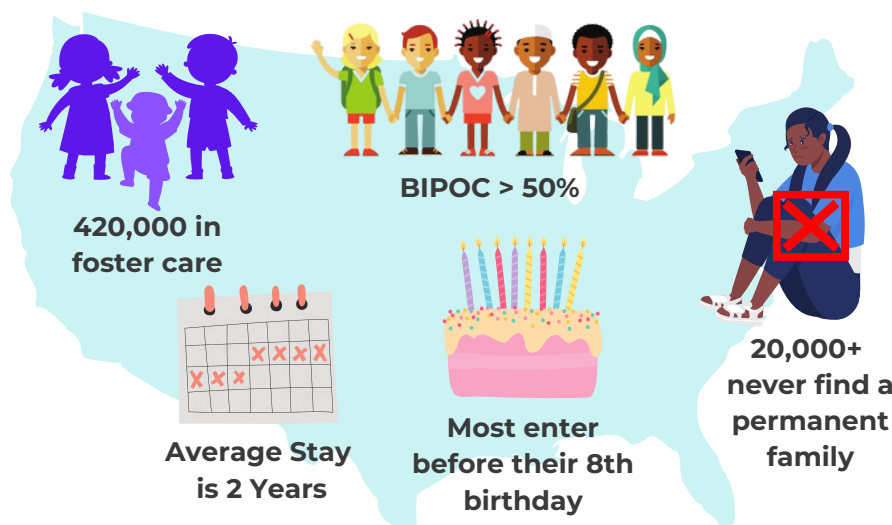
Children who remain in the foster care system and “age out” as young adults face enormous barriers. Compared to their peers, they are less likely to have earned a high school diploma or pursue higher education. They experience higher levels of long-term unemployment and homelessness. Those who age out of foster care are more likely to become young parents to children who themselves are more likely to enter our broken child welfare system.ⁱ

Black girls in foster care are subjected to higher rates of residential and school changes, higher discipline rates, lower achievement rates, lower graduation rates, and higher rates of involvement in the juvenile justice system and human trafficking than their white peers. They are also less likely to receive treatment and services!ⁱ

We are failing to reunite young people – especially Black children – with their families, failing to find them permanent homes and failing to equip them with the knowledge, resources, skills and encouragement needed to recognize and achieve their potential. Each year, more than 26,000 youth transition from foster care without the typical growing-up experiences that teach self-sufficiency.^{vi} They are without the family and community networks that support successful transitions to adulthood.

For Black children – particularly Black girls – too often the child welfare system is a pipeline into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. In *Black Families Matter: How the Child Welfare System Punishes Poor Families of Color*,ⁱⁱⁱ the authors' research uncovers a system that is stacked against brown and Black families. They make the case that foster care, in its current state, is an extension of a racist carceral regime: *This system inflicts incredible harm on Black families and their communities. Removing a child from [their] home is one of the most violent acts a government can undertake against its people. Yet the child welfare system has operated in this discriminatory and dehumanizing way with too little attention from society.*

Snapshot: Foster Care in the United States



According to the US Child Welfare Information Gateway's 2019 report, across the country, 424,000 infants, toddlers, children and teens are in our foster care system, well over half of whom are people of color. 32% are 2-years-old or younger, and the average child entering care is younger than 8-years-old. Children remain in care an average of about two years, and in 2019 nearly 22,000 children had been languishing in foster for more than five years. Also in 2019, more than 20,000 youth aged out never having found a permanent family.

Progressive Life Center Responds

PLC's mission is "to improve the lives of children, youth and families by providing human services that meet the psychological, spiritual and cultural needs of those we serve." Founded in 1983 in Washington, DC with a single program to support Black court-involved youth and their families, today, PLC delivers positive outcomes for children, youth, and their families, throughout the mid-Atlantic. PLC supports the most vulnerable children and youth, including those in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, those facing economic insecurity and housing instability, and those with mental health needs. PLC is nationally recognized for its pioneering work in developing culturally responsive approaches to child and family development and to mental health. A leader in its field, PLC has remained accredited by the Council on Accreditations (COA) for more than 20 years.



We must do more to reform the child welfare system:

- **First**, we must increase our efforts to **provide rich opportunities** to children and youth who are already in care.
- **Second**, we must expand our reach to **strengthen and empower individual families**, toward eliminating the need for a child's out-of-home placement.
- **And third**, we must educate and empower youth and families, and together, **advocate for changes** in the system that disproportionately impacts communities of color.

PLC has the experience and the methodology to support systemic change. We have a solid foundation of staff and volunteers. But to do more, we must broaden our base, reinforce our team, and engage with new stakeholders.

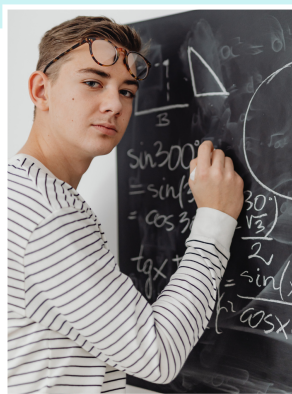
Expanding our Efforts

Through direct services to children and families, and targeted advocacy efforts, we must expand our efforts to:



Address and treat trauma to break generational cycles.

1



Champion pre- and post-secondary academic excellence.

2



Provide exposure and pathways to personal and career success.

3



Support improved biological family relationships and reunification.

4



Engage in local and national efforts to reshape the foster care system.

5

Our Vision for Transforming Lives

According to the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute's 2021 recommendations to Congress, **Black students in foster care face significant educational disadvantages and are unfairly labeled as disruptive and troubled when in reality, their behavior is a direct result of trauma.** The report calls on Congress to provide these young people with access to safe, supportive, trauma-informed environments, and access to counseling and healing.

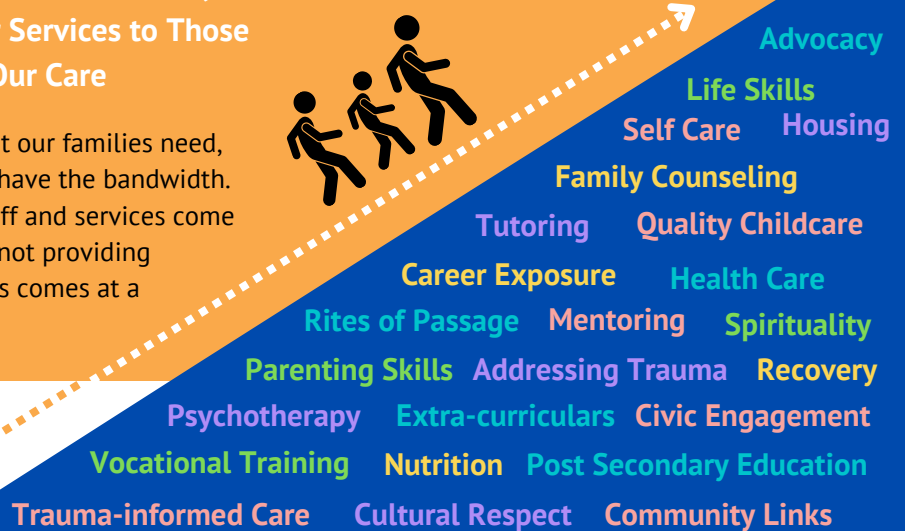
As longtime providers of foster care and a range of family services, PLC has strong ties throughout human services systems, and a deep understanding of the majority-Black population we serve. With this access, understanding and experience, we have the opportunity to do some truly transformational work. In partnership with local governments, nonprofits and community leaders, PLC's program expansions will augment children's public education and drive high-quality learning experiences to improve academic, personal and social skills. We will address special education needs and provide individualized supports. Our efforts will focus on enhancing analytical thinking and academic skills, with an emphasis on reading and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). Students will be exposed to a wide range of career options through guest speakers, workplace visits and career days. Such exposure is designed to ignite curiosity and imagination, while helping youth to visualize themselves as worthy, confident and contributing members of our community. Individual, group and family counseling will focus on addressing trauma, building relationships and social skills, and practicing coping strategies.

Our Country's Government-funded Child Welfare System is Not Enough

Funded primarily through state and local taxes, our nation's foster care, family preservation, and kinship care services simply do not do enough. Children, youth and families are, at a minimum, surviving. More must be done to open doors to wellness, opportunity and success.

With Additional Resources, PLC Will Bolster Services to Those Already in Our Care

We know what our families need, we just don't have the bandwidth. Additional staff and services come at a cost, but not providing these supports comes at a greater cost.



Expanding our Efforts

Supporting Academic Excellence

- Individualized educational assessment
- Goal setting and progress monitoring
- Tailored instruction and tutoring
- Advocacy and liaison with school personnel
- Educational planning and advocacy
- Study and homework skills building
- Mastery of advanced concepts
- SAT/ACT prep

Delivering Cultural Enrichment

- Career exposure, job shadowing, internships
- Cultural and recreational field trips and activities
- Mentoring
- Summer enrichment programs

Providing Emotional Support

- Trauma-informed care from all staff
- Individual, group and family counseling
- Parenting education
- Multi-family therapeutic retreats

We Can and Must Do More

Yes, we are improving the lives of children, youth and families who fall into the social safety net. But it's time to move from improving lives to breaking the chains of intergenerational trauma toward community transformation. This requires funding beyond that which is provided through local, state and federal contracts. Private funds will elevate PLC's efforts, to better meet the needs of those we serve.

A Baltimore Teen's Journey

In 2013, our after-school Adolescent Clubhouse began serving Baltimore teens referred by the City after entering the juvenile justice system with substance related charges. The Clubhouse operates on a harm-reduction model, with a focus on motivating youth to evaluate their lives, consider changes, and map a path for change. Life-skills training, self-esteem building and personal improvement are woven through daily enrichment activities ranging from homework completion and meal prep, to karaoke and basketball.

Jasmine* was referred to the Clubhouse in early 2016, a painfully shy 15-year-old with low self-esteem. While attending high school, she was also caring for adult family members and helping raise her little brother. Jasmine attended the Clubhouse for several years, and staff supported her evolution into a confident young woman. In her chaotic world, the Clubhouse provided support and stability. Jasmine learned to focus on that which she could control, and develop skills for coping with that which she could not control. Despite moving more than 10 times during high school, she graduated, developed healthy relationships with peers, and worked – often full-time – in support of her family and herself. Jasmine is still helping her family, but today she is fully independent and enrolled in the nursing program at Baltimore City Community College. There is no stopping her now! And, Jasmine's example and guidance is helping pave the way for others, like her little brother who is now a Clubhouse kid. *pseudonym for privacy



Let's intensify Clubhouse summer programming to combat learning loss and spikes in juvenile crime.

Kinship Care: Let's Make it a Household Name, Not a One-of-a-Kind

When a family member – more often than not, a grandmother – steps in to raise a child because the biological parents are unwilling or unable, this is called kinship care. Kinship care keeps a child out of foster care, in a familiar environment, and with someone they love and who loves them back. But when Grandma suddenly becomes a primary caregiver, there is so much to figure out.

PLC's unique Kinship Care Program is a virtual and in-home visiting program, through which we help caregivers navigate school, childcare, extra-curriculars, medical, dental, housing, the guardianship process, accessing public funds, and more. We also provide welcomed emotional support, counseling and financial assistance, setting kinship caregivers up for success.



PLC's Prince George's County Kinship Care Program is unique and valuable. Based upon our years of kinship service, and in collaboration with partners like Catholic University, PLC strives to develop an evidence-based approach for national implementation.

I was lost, but I was referred to the kinship program and since then things are going smoothly. They gave me all the resources that I needed to get help for my great granddaughter.

-A grateful PLC Kinship Care Program client

Family Preservation: Overcoming Crisis and Regaining Independence

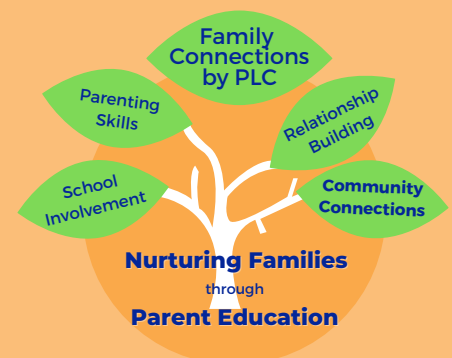
A family is suddenly homeless. So much chaos. Six children, ages 3 through 10. And the school year is about to begin. Mom needs to go to work, but it is impossible to focus on anything knowing that her family is in such precarious limbo. This is the story of Tiana, her fiancé Lisa, and their blended family. Through no fault of their own, they lost their apartment. In desperation, they began crashing on the couches of friends and families. They were often separated, and practically paralyzed with worry.

But this is one of the lucky families. Referred by Montgomery County (Md.) Health and Human Services, Tiana and Lisa began working through the steps of PLC's Family Connections. Our case manager Erin got busy helping turn the family's overwhelmed state into an empowered state, guiding them through seemingly simple tasks that can become crushing in a crisis. A budget, family rules, parenting skills, relationship discussions, community connections, and engaging with their children's schools. Soon, and with a small monetary stipend, the family of eight was moving into their new home. In a few short months, a family in crisis became a family celebrating a marriage. Today, Tiana works full-time while Lisa cares for the children. But weekends are for family! A time when the moms can parent together, and the family can enjoy each other. Family Connections helped facilitate good communication, within the family, and with the children's school, supporting the development of Individualized Education Plans for several of the children, ensuring their academic and emotional needs are met throughout the school day.

A family in crisis came out on the other end, equipped with the skills and community connections to ensure independence, and the health, safety and wellbeing of the children and moms.

We need more of these programs. 59% of Americans are one paycheck away from homelessness.

-2019 Charles Schwab Modern Wealth Survey



PLC Today and Tomorrow

Each year, PLC supports more than 1,000 children and youth, and their family networks. This includes biological and foster parents, biological and foster siblings, and extended family, including kinship caregivers.

Supporting Children Who are Already in the System

Foster Care Today

- Parent recruiting, initial/continuing training, and licensing
- Develop and manage child profiles
- Support child placements

Foster Care Add-ons for Tomorrow

- Specialized individual, group and family trauma counseling
- Academic enrichment that goes beyond tutoring
- Cultural and career enrichment and exposure

Independent Living Today

- Scattered site apartments with 24/7 oversight
- Four or more weekly staff drop ins
- General support, guidance and skills building

Independent Living Add-ons for Tomorrow

- Specialized individual and group trauma counseling
- Enhanced secondary education opportunities and funding
- Cultural and career enrichment and exposure

Keeping Children Safe and Out of the System

Kinship Care Today

- Mental health support, goal setting and achievement
- Family communication, school communication
- Referrals, linkages and family activities

Kinship Care Add-ons for Tomorrow

- Specialized individual and family trauma counseling
- Academic enrichment that goes beyond tutoring
- Cultural and career enrichment and exposure

Family Preservation Today

- Parenting skills training to ensure child(s) wellbeing
- Practical strategies, like budgeting and family rules
- Referrals, linkages and family activities

Family Preservation Add-ons for Tomorrow

- Cultural and career enrichment for adults and youth
- Longer term support with increased financial aid
- Increased access to individual and family counseling

Breaking the Cycle

Domestic Violence Supports Today

- African American focused domestic violence education for faith leaders and the broader community
- Awareness of red flags, and how bystanders can support those effected by domestic violence
- "Sistahs With Voices" survivor support group

Domestic Violence Supports Add-ons for Tomorrow

- Short-term housing for those fleeing domestic violence
- Improved information sharing and resources for those experiencing domestic violence
- Expanded programming with youth, including at HBCUs

Substance Abuse Prevention Today

- After school programming for youth with or at-risk of substance abuse disorders
- Referrals to community-based substance abuse programs

Substance Abuse Prevention Add-ons for Tomorrow

- Expand drug and alcohol education resources across programs
- Treatment for substance abuse disorders
- Access to residential substance use disorder treatment

Strengthening Systems and Advocating for Change

Supporting Grass Roots Efforts Today

- Administering collectives of small providers to effectively serve local communities
- Grant administration for initiatives that engage local individuals and organization in community transformation

Supporting Grass Roots Efforts Tomorrow

- Provide additional resources and opportunities to small, local providers
- Develop additional programming for local provider engagement

Advocacy and Education Today

- Empowering individuals and families through education and community linkages
- Certification and ongoing education in NTU™ our culturally sensitive, spiritually based therapeutic model

Advocacy and Education Add-ons for Tomorrow

- Develop a best-practices kinship care program model for national implementation
- Activate alliances with colleague providers, advocating for systemic change



Please Help Us Continue to Transform Lives

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Sources:

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iii Bethany Christian Services, What the Pandemic Taught Us: Innovative Practice Report, 2021.

iv Published in The Appeal, 3/26/2018.

v Navigating the Path to a Successful Career: Barriers for Youth in Foster Care and the Juvenile Justice System, Juvenile Law Center, 2017.

vi Enduring neurobiological effects of childhood abuse and neglect, Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry; Teicher and Samson, 2016.

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