

think of **us**

2022: A Year in Review



A Letter From Sixto



Sixto Cancel
Chief Executive
Officer & Founder

We stand at a pivotal moment, facing a once-in-a-generation opportunity to fundamentally reshape the child welfare system.

The collective experience of the pandemic has forced the child welfare system to rapidly adapt to new challenges. Expanded funding opportunities have been put to innovative uses. A growing consensus of leaders recognize that child welfare too often fails to meet the needs of those it serves.

We've shifted from a narrow concept of child safety to a broader emphasis on family wellbeing. Reform efforts increasingly focus on helping families stay together, rather than breaking them apart.

However, while there is broad agreement on our greatest challenges, we struggle to find solutions that address root causes and work at scale.

I founded Think of Us to give people impacted by child welfare an opportunity to change that system. Throughout history, the most successful movements for systemic change – ending child labor and Jim Crow, gaining women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights – have one crucial thing in common: they were envisioned, built, and executed by the people impacted by the problem. This idea is now becoming widely accepted: that lived experience must be central to creating effective systemic reform.

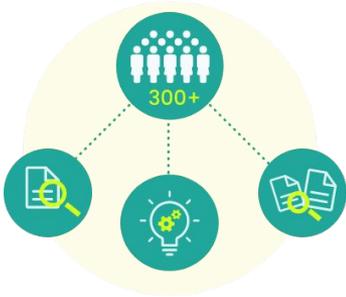
At Think of Us, centering lived experience means we're committed to a process, not a predetermined solution. Our novel structure and approach are the results of this commitment, consistently applied. As new opportunities arise, we adapt.

To meet this moment, we must respond differently. We have been working this year to expand from an owner-operator model to one where ownership of the vision is shared among senior leaders, welcoming experienced leaders from diverse sectors to drive our mission forward. Our shared commitment to deeply engaging lived experts is allowing us to codify a perspective, process, and set of tools that together create pathways to effect large-scale systemic change.

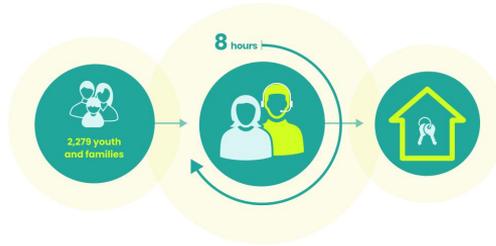
I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the thousands of lived experts and many individuals, organizations, and funders who partner with us in this work.

Thank you.

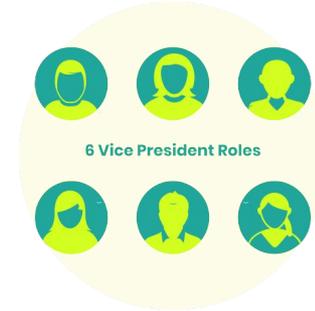
Highlights of the Year



We launched the **Center for Lived Experience** in May 2022 with more than **300 partners and stakeholders** from government, philanthropy, and social service organizations in attendance. Proximate policy efforts, **4 foundational research projects**, technical assistance to **5 partner research projects**, and collaboration on **6 strategic initiatives** are already underway.

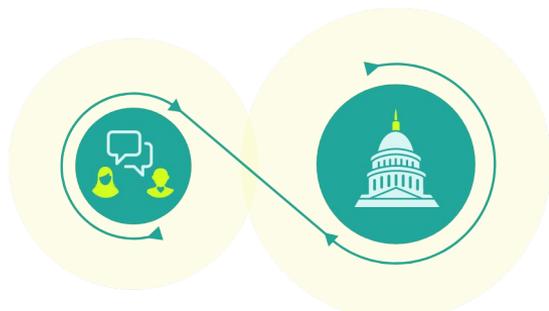


Our Virtual Support Services empowered **2,279 youth and families** to access critical resources. Average response time was **8 business hours**, building trust and ensuring that people get the help they need when they need it.



Think of Us established **6 Vice President Roles** in its new leadership structure. Our expanded Senior Leadership team includes **VPs of Engineering, Direct Impact, External Engagement, People, Research & Design, and Strategic Partnerships & Implementation.**

Highlights of the Year (cont)



Our Center for Lived Experience proximate policy team is engaged with more than **60 congressional offices**, representing **37 states**.

This year, our research and work has informed:

A brief to the **U.S. Supreme Court**

A **U.S. Senate investigation**

A **Department of Justice investigation**

A seminal book on racial inequity in foster care

Research published by the **ACLU** and **Human Rights Watch**

Research workgroup with the **Children's Bureau**

Articles published in:

The NY Times

NBC News

The Economist

The Washington Post

The Chronicle of Philanthropy

The Stanford Social Innovation Review

LA Sentinel

The Imprint

USA Today



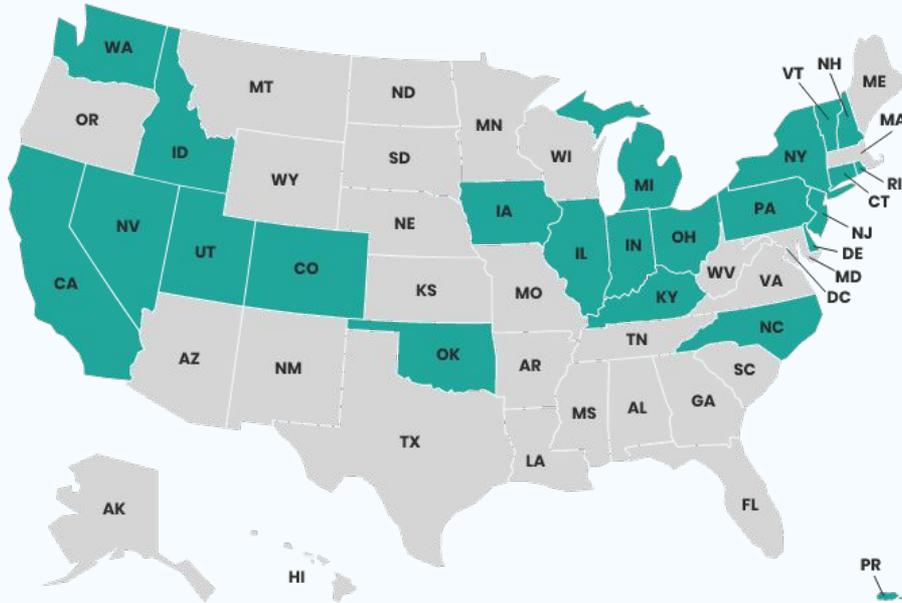
"In working closely with Sixto and Think of Us over the years, I've witnessed how much reverence he and the team have for the people and organizations that came before them to improve the lives of children and families, especially youth transitioning from foster care. These leaders created unprecedented pathways to child welfare reform. Think of Us is building on their leadership and creating new innovations to build on the progress already made and continue the momentum."



Sandra Gasca-Gonzalez

Vice President, Center for Systems Innovation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation

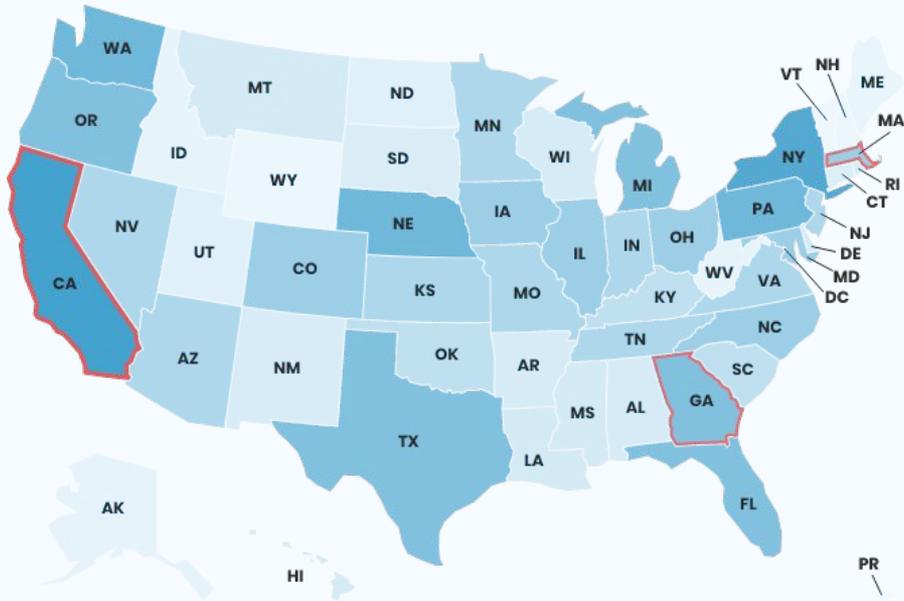
Nationwide Engagement Away From Home



States that we have engaged in the ripple effects of *Away From Home*, our report on the experiences and perspectives of young people who have lived in institutional placements in foster care.

Nationwide Engagement

Lived Experience Data and Evidence



We've had 51,244 interactions with individuals through our Lived Experience Engine in 2022.

Lived Experience Engine

VSS/Direct Impact - CA, GA & Greater Boston

Catalytic Initiatives



In 2022, Think of Us has deepened our commitment to building proximity between those who make decisions for the child welfare system and those most affected by it. Working in partnership with players across the child welfare ecosystem – from frontline workers and county administrators to leading funders and federal policymakers – we’ve engaged systems-changing initiatives that integrate lived experience at every step.

Below, we hope to show how three of our recent initiatives have driven systemic impact across the country.

Launching the Center for Lived Experience

The Center for Lived Experience is a state and federal policy and research initiative launched in 2022 to create proximity at scale between decision-makers and people with lived experience in child welfare. It addresses ecosystem knowledge gaps by building feedback loops to elevate lived experience data and establish proof points for lived experts to formally engage in bipartisan policy making and collaboration.

We're pioneering new approaches in participatory and trauma-responsive research design and implementation that ensure research participants are equitably engaged and empowered to make choices about how their data will be used. We're building relationships with key leaders and congressional committee members, working with the White House and agencies to steer policy, partnering with others to educate members of Congress, and identifying champions across the federal ecosystem. The Center is laying the groundwork for permanent structures through which people with lived experience can co-create a child welfare system that truly meets the needs of youth and families.



Launching the Center for Lived Experience (cont)

WHITE HOUSE AGENDA



Joined two closed-door roundtables: one with the **Domestic Policy Council** and the **White House Office of Public Engagement** and one with **Secretary Becerra of the Department of Health and Human Services** to support the **Biden Administration's** priorities for child welfare

Provided data and consultation on food insecurity among current and former foster youth to support the historic **White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health** and its coordinated strategy

One of six featured organizations for the Child Tax Credit and Federal Income Tax Credit Day of Action with **Vice President Harris** and **Treasury Secretary Yellen**

Invited by **President Biden** to attend the signing of the Executive Order on advancing equality for LGBTQI+ individuals

CONGRESSIONAL POLICY



Collaboration in the **Journey to Success** campaign to educate policymakers and improve outcomes for youth who experience foster care with the **Raikes Foundation**, **Conrad N. Hilton Foundation**, and **Doris Duke Charitable Foundation**

More than 60 meetings with **congressional offices** to educate policymakers on the needs and experiences of people impacted by foster care

Co-hosted a Congressional dinner with the **Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth, Embrace Families**, and **Treehouse** to move the Foster Youth and Driving Act forward

CEO Sixto Cancel moderated a panel discussion with the **Congressional Black Caucus Foundation** on kinship care's critical role in stability for children

Launching the Center for Lived Experience (cont)

SUPREME COURT

Signed an Amicus brief that was referenced 3 times in **Supreme Court** oral arguments in support of the Indian Child Welfare Act with **Casey Family Programs** and other leading child welfare organizations



ENGAGING LIVED EXPERTS

Hosted a town hall on the administration's strategic priorities for child welfare with the **White House, Office of the Surgeon General, and Children's Bureau**

Supporting the **State of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman** to leverage lived experience voices in recommending state policy reforms

Convened lived experts to advise and support the **Children's Bureau** in the development of its strategic priorities

In partnership with the **State of Washington**, we convened a team of lived experts presenting learnings to drive statewide reform

INNOVATING RESEARCH PRACTICES



In partnership with **Stand Together, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Aviv Foundation**, conducted a study on the experiences of teenagers during Child Protective Services investigations

Released **Aged Out 2.0** with updates and policy considerations for the current moment

Codifying participatory and trauma-responsive research practices

Provided technical assistance to partners in recruiting and supporting research participants with lived experience in foster care

Joined several research coalitions to advance knowledge and research practices around topics such as racial equity, disability rights, and data justice

The Ripple Effects of Away From Home

***Away from Home* examined the experiences and perspectives of young people who recently lived in institutional placements in foster care, revealing shocking patterns of abuse, isolation, neglect, overmedication, and traumatization in environments that were unloving, punitive, and prison-like. Following publication, twenty-two states committed to ending the need for group home placements.**

We are now partnering with six of these jurisdictions to make this commitment a reality by prioritizing kin and culturally-responsive placements instead of institutions. This has shifted the national conversation around the institutionalization of youth and demonstrates the power of lived experience data to shift mental models and drive systemic change.



The Ripple Effects of Away From Home (cont)

FEDERAL INVESTIGATIONS



Cited in a **U.S. Senate** investigation of the four largest companies that institutionalize youth

Cited by the **U.S. Department of Justice** in a legal action against the state of Nevada for subjecting children with disabilities to unnecessary institutionalization

PRACTICE INNOVATION



Partnering to end the need for group home placements for foster youth in six jurisdictions: **California, Connecticut, Indiana, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Allegheny County, Pennsylvania**

In partnership with the **Annie E. Casey Foundation** and **Allegheny County, Pennsylvania**, conducted a Deep Dive with people with lived experience about how to reduce institutionalization of foster youth for behavior needs

Conducting research with **Casey Family Programs** and the **State of Indiana**, exploring kin as alternative to group home placements

Launching the Center for Lived Experience (cont)

FEDERAL POLICY



Convened the National Foster Care Month Roundtable with the **Domestic Policy Council, White House Office of Management and Budget, Office of Public Engagement, Office of the Vice President,** and **the Administration for Children and Families**

Co-convened a congressional briefing with the **Senate Foster Youth Caucus, Congressional Foster Youth Caucus,** and **Congressional Adoption Caucus** to elevate the voices of lived experts

Provided insight and expertise at a congressional briefing to educate **members of Congress** and their **staff** on the experiences of foster youth in congregate care facilities

Exploring bipartisan legislation with leaders of the **Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth** to address abuse in congregate care facilities

CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS



Provided subject-matter expertise for **an article in the NY Times** on the importance of kinship care in reforming child welfare

Cited by **Human Rights Watch** and the **ACLU** in a report on family separation due to conditions of poverty

Joined acclaimed sociologist and law professor **Dorothy Roberts** and the **Juvenile Law Center** for a discussion on her seminal book on racial inequity in foster care, which cited *Away From Home*

Lived Experience Data & Evidence

Our Lived Experience Engine connects 38,000+ individuals directly impacted by child welfare, including former foster youth, biological parents, and kin caregivers. These individuals inform everything we do, from providing data and insights through research, to co-designing tools such as Virtual Support Services, to using their voices to shift the conversation with federal and state leaders.

The Platform allows us to leverage robust, growing, dynamic datasets to inform policy and practice across the child welfare ecosystem. We are now inviting lived experts and partners to inform how we maximize the value of this resource while continuing to innovate data-protection and privacy standards.



Lived Experience Data & Evidence (cont)

TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE



Building a content database, data warehouse, and dashboards to maximize the value of lived experience data for partners and stakeholders

IMPACT OF DATA



Directly engaged **22,000 transition-age youth** who may have been eligible for earned income tax credit through provisions in the American Rescue Plan

Learning from **44 states, Washington D.C.**, and a wide array of ecosystem partners about the impacts of the Check for Us initiative

Strategic sharing of anonymized, aggregated lived experience data with **states, Congressional offices,** and **advocates across the child welfare ecosystem** to share key learnings and align priorities

Lived Experience Data & Evidence (cont)

VIRTUAL SUPPORT SERVICES



Expanded our Direct Impact through Virtual Support Services in **California**, **Georgia**, and the **Greater Boston Area**:

- **1,961 individuals** accessed critical resources
- **95.8%** had initial needs resolved

Virtual Support Services connected individuals to critical resources in partnership with **Boston CASA**, **Box, CA Alliance for Caregivers**, **Echoes of Hope**, **Georgia RYSE**, **Get Schooled**, and **mRelief**

In **California** and **Greater Boston**, we deployed MicroCash grants to better understand the needs youth and families

PRACTICE INNOVATION



Partnered with **Chapin Hall** to evaluate the Virtual Support Services approach as an intervention for application to the **Federal Prevention Services Clearinghouse**.

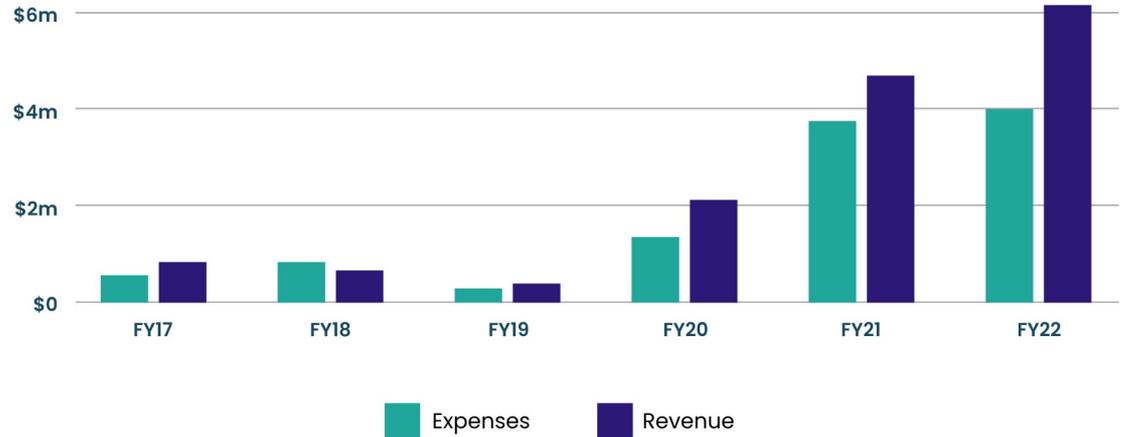
Joined **Jim Casey Fellows** and the **Annie E. Casey Foundation** to collaborate on SOUL Family, a lived-expert driven fourth permanency option, now piloting in **Kansas**.

This moment is an inflection point for the child welfare system to embrace that through centering lived experience, true systems change is both actionable and achievable.

By building diverse, interconnected pathways to systems change, engaging lived experts to clarify problems and design holistic solutions, conducting new research to fill historic knowledge gaps, building feedback loops to put that data in the hands of decision-makers, innovating scalable solutions to practical problems, and coordinating collaboration across the national ecosystem, we can drive unprecedented transformation, together.

Our Financial & Operational Growth

Our growth over the past five years has been mirrored by a steady growth in earned and contributed revenue. This year, we prepared to further scale our impact by expanding our executive team, adding leaders with proven success managing organizations through periods of growth. Additionally, we're investing in robust technological infrastructure to accommodate increased demand for our services.





"This year we built out research, data, and policy teams that are unlocking the possibility that lived experts – those with direct experience with foster care – will influence all levels of how the system operates."

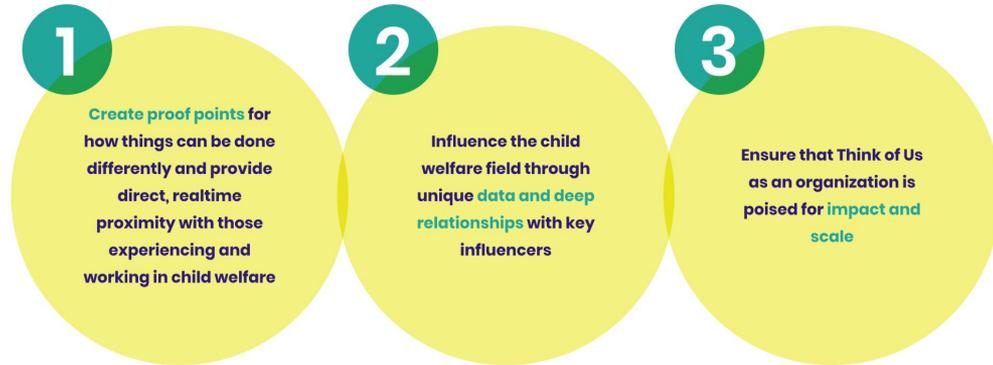


Liz Mills
Vice President, Operations

2023 Strategic Pillars & the Future

Centering lived experience is more than a moral imperative, it is the critical pathway to understanding and addressing the root of systemic problems in child welfare. Our approach invites policymakers and practitioners to join with lived experts in an entrepreneurial enterprise not possible from within traditional bureaucracies - to design, test, and iterate novel, scalable solutions, and to identify and empower those best positioned to implement those solutions.

As we discover together what works, we aim to codify scalable strategies into policy, shift mental models, and redirect resource flows so that solutions are far-reaching and sustainable for generations to come.



A group of eight diverse young adults, including men and women of various ethnicities, are standing in front of the United States Capitol building. They are all smiling and holding copies of a report titled "think of @ Young People Hear: Youth Experiences of Institutional Placements in Foster Care". The report cover features a circular graphic with a person's face. The background is a teal-tinted image of the Capitol building's dome and columns.

We are deeply grateful for your partnership in the collective movement towards systems change in child welfare.

Thank You

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