INTRODUCTION

Los Angeles County has the sad distinction as the “homeless capital of the nation.” Of the homeless in the County, one-third are families and youth. The scope of the problem is such that addressing it in an impactful and sustaining way requires a true cross-sector effort. Imagine LA’s Family Empowerment and Mentorship (FEM) model not only unleashes private community resources and maximizes the utilization of public resources, it also creates a safe space to nurture relationships among people who, given the divisions of race and class in our city, would otherwise not know each other.

We are at an exciting inflection point. In 2016, we worked with our 100th family. We doubled the number of family and mentor teams – with less than a 10% increase in our operating budget. We launched several pilot projects to test the scalability our model. We continued to put in place the infrastructure and systems to support growth. **We ended the year poised for continued, exponential growth.**

We hope you will enjoy reading on the following pages about how your generous support contributed to this banner year. We thank you for your commitment to ending the cycles of homelessness, chronic poverty, and neglect in Los Angeles County.

IMAGINE LA’S FAMILY EMPOWERMENT AND MENTORSHIP MODEL

Imagine LA mobilizes the community to work together to end the cycle of family and youth homelessness, poverty and neglect. Imagine LA and our partners understand that a roof over one’s head is merely a starting point to a better life. Our goal is to help vulnerable families maintain housing, improve financial stability, build vibrant relationships, and ensure that every family member thrives.

Think Housing First Imagine LA second. Our innovative Family Empowerment & Mentorship (FEM) model provides recently-housed, vulnerable families in Los Angeles County with intensive case management and mentorship for a one-to-two-year period. Our professional staff works with families to set goals and access private and public resources and trains volunteer to offer one-on-one mentorship to each member of the family. **Week-by-week, month-by-month, mentors, families and Imagine LA staff build strong relationships and lay the groundwork for stability and success.**

Imagine LA partners with very low-income families in the County who have recently experienced homelessness and are now in housing or have recently emancipated from foster care. Typical family challenges include: domestic violence (48%), mental illness (45%), and substance abuse (18%); 48% have had experiences with the child welfare system. Ninety-one percent of families are female-led households, with children ranging in age from newborn to
late teens. Forty-five percent are Multiracial, 20% African American, 30% Hispanic and 5% White. Families are spread across the county, with two-thirds located in South or Metro LA.

In the past decade, Imagine LA has served 100 families and partnered with over 500 volunteers and more than 100 community-based organizations. Of the families that graduated from the FEM:

- All have maintained housing.
- All have demonstrated heightened financial literacy, including 71% increase in earned income and 68% decrease in debt!
- All youth participants are reaching their developmental milestones, are achieving at grade level and, if applicable, pursuing post-secondary education
- All participants are pursuing wellness and up-to-date on their medical and dental exams

$35,000
Combined value of volunteer time and private resources (per family, per year)

2016 HIGHLIGHTS

2016 was a year of significant growth and significant capacity building. We focused on four settings for growth: formerly homeless families in scattered site or Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), emancipating parenting foster youth and training other providers in the Family Empowerment & Mentorship (FEM) model. Programmatic highlights from 2016 included:

- We began our South Los Angeles Families Thriving Initiative and, with support from Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, are now working with 17 families in the area.
- We launched our pilot Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Family Service Demonstration project with funding from Corporation for Supportive Housing. The project sets out to test the hypothesis that the FEM model, which has long been successful in scattered-site housing settings, can stabilize and empower families in PSH environments – and even enable them to move on from PSH. It also assesses whether working with multiple

From a Family’s Journey ....

Amalaya* was committed to building a stable life for her son, Levi*, but had been struggling to find steady employment. She often thought about going back to school and, in 2016, with the encouragement of her Imagine LA mentors, she enrolled in Codetalk, a coding program sponsored by Snapchat. In only 15 weeks, Amalaya learned the skills necessary to obtain a part-time job as the social media coordinator for the Downtown Women’s Center. Thanks to this new work opportunity, she increased her income by $1,100 per month. This part-time employment was a huge step forward on her journey to achieve financial stability and independence.

*Alias
families at a site improves operational efficiency and community-building. The project launched in December 2016 in partnership with A Community of Friends (ACOF) PSH apartment complex in Compton and includes formative and summative assessments by a third-party evaluator.

- We successfully began implementation of our Transitional Age Youth Family Thriving (TAYFT) pilot in conjunction with the LA County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The pilot targets 20-year old youth who are emancipating from the foster care system with young children of their own. We are currently working with 10 emancipating parenting families. The project is being evaluated by an Associate Dean at the USC School of Social Work.

- The City of Whittier approached us to help develop “Imagine Whittier.” We are now working on a joint implementation and funding plan to train/license our FEM model. Imagine LA’s training services would include: guiding the hiring and training of new and existing staff and community volunteers (under The Whole Child umbrella, the lead agency); recruiting, screening, training of both families and mentor teams; and supporting the implementation of the model. We have fielded requests from other communities and are excited to pilot this training structure in 2017-2018.

- Secured Department of Health Services (DHS) funding. In 2016, DHS invited us to apply to become an official Master Service Provider. This status allows us to provide intensive case management and mentorship (our FEM model) to families involved with Housing First, the County’s rapid rehousing initiative for individuals and families. We are now the only DHS family after-housing service provider (all existing service providers are for single adults). We anticipate serving families via DHS funding beginning mid-2017.

- Significantly increased volunteer and community involvement. In 2016, we actively outreached to Rotary Clubs, Neighborhood Councils, and companies with a large local presence (e.g., Cedars-Sinai) that offer opportunities to recruit volunteers at scale. In addition, we secured partnerships with six online referral sources (e.g., Mentor.gov, Idealist) to recruit volunteer online.

Beyond program expansion, 2016 also brought increased visibility and support for our work. We are now an official part of the Mayor of Los Angeles’ Volunteer Corps, and part of the city and county’s strategy to end homelessness. We continue to recruit and onboard highly capable and committed Board members. Our board now totals 14 people who, together, raised a third of our annual operating budget.

In 2016, we doubled the number of families and mentors!

- 48 families (up from 24 in 2015)
- 179 volunteer mentors (up from 90 in 2015)
We also successfully completed our first special fundraising campaign. Spurred on by a matching grant from the Weingart Foundation, we raised a $100,000 in working capital/cash reserve, which has already helped us respond to promising new opportunities and manage day-to-day cash flow.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our strategic plan, Striving for Sustainability & and Scalability (2014-2018) is grounded in the vision of working with more families and volunteer mentors. We made significant strides in 2016 towards this vision; we are poised for another year of growth and capacity building.

We are excited to spend the first quarter of 2017 focused on further enhancing our internal systems, bringing on new team members, increasing our volunteer mentor recruiting capabilities and implementing our new PSH demonstration project. Come spring 2017 and beyond, we anticipate strong growth and potential new funding opportunities in the areas of scattered site, TAY and training/licensing.

In the coming year, we will continue to focus on fundraising and other strategies to sustain and grow our model; including:

- **Government:** We are in active conversations with several County agencies, including DHS, LAHSA, First 5 LA, DCFS and the Board of Supervisors to offer our program on a fee-for-service basis. We are eager to implement the DHS contract.

- **Individual Donors:** We will continue to build relationships with current and prospective individual donors – a team effort that relies on the expertise and passion of our Board of Directors and staff.

- **Community Partners:** We are creating customized annual Community Partnerships that align each partner’s interests and skills with our unique volunteer and sponsorship opportunities as well as their special areas of interest (e.g. funding family savings match dollars).

- **Events:** In addition to our signature Imagine Ball concert, we are thrilled to bring back the Celebration of Family event, which welcomes families, mentors and supporters to an old-fashioned carnival of family fun and community building.

- **Cost of Impact Study:** We are working with a Riordan Fellow whose specialty is data analytics to understand the cost of impact/return on investment of our model. We anticipate the results of this analysis will provide rich data to support our fundraising and other outreach efforts.

In summary, these are both exciting and focused times! Imagine LA is poised for continued exponential – and sustainable – growth. With your continued partnership, we hope to mobilize the community to help hundreds of more vulnerable families maintain housing, improve financial stability, build vibrant relationships, and ensure that every family member thrives!