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**BEYOND CAMP:  
BUILDING A TRAIL TO SUCCESS**

Happy Trails for Kids  
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## INTRODUCTION TO HAPPY TRAILS

Happy Trails for Kids provides youth in foster care overnight camping and outdoor adventure, as well as varied year round programs and events. Since Happy Trails Camp began in 2009, we have opened our doors to over 800 deserving and amazing children. To promote stability and community, we strive to keep our campers and staff committed to the program for the long haul. As a result, youth are growing up with Happy Trails and we are beginning to serve increasing populations of youth who are entering their adolescent and even young adult years. We are at a unique crossroads in our program. Given the high level of program engagement and commitment demonstrated by these older youth, we want to do more for them, and we know more needs to be done. This is why we are creating the Trails to Success Initiative ... to expand experiences, deepen personal strengths, and promote academic and workforce success for these young leaders.





## FOSTER YOUTH DESERVE MORE

Children in foster care are a vulnerable and underserved segment of the population. Like many at-risk youth, they typically live in lower-income areas. Being in the system creates additional challenges, as foster youth are often separated from their biological siblings, relatives and friends, abruptly uprooted from their residences and schools, and stigmatized by their peers. Despite living in a community with rich outdoor opportunities and diverse extracurricular activities, too often, foster children in Los Angeles are deprived of the chance to benefit from the "every day" normalcy that defines healthy childhood development. The limitations placed upon children growing up in foster care deeply restrict their ability to develop interests, build lasting connections, and navigate the adult world.



### BARRIERS TO NORMALCY

Restrictive child welfare policies and practices • Structure of placements  
• Placement moves • Inability to maintain relationships • A "culture of no"  
• Lack of decision-making opportunities • Heightened scrutiny • Lack of funds and transportation • The stigma of foster care

*What Young People Need to Thrive Leveraging the Strengthening Families Act to Promote Normalcy,  
By the Annie E. Casey Foundation Report, November 12, 2015*

# HAPPY TRAILS IS HERE TO HELP!

## OFFERING CAMPING, CONNECTIONS AND CONFIDENCE.

To combat the barriers of foster care, Happy Trails prioritizes meaningful interactions and activities that enrich the lives of the children we serve. By taking part in camp activities and year-round supportive programming with other children in foster care, our campers escape the stress, loneliness and feelings of social exclusion often reported by children in care. They are exposed to new experiences and given the opportunity to develop their interests and connect to a community where they feel loved and supported.

## OUR CURRENT PROGRAMS:

Summer Camp, Reunion Events, Full Family Events, LASSO, Junior Counselor  
Spring Leadership Camp & Winter Camp



## SUMMER CAMP

Each summer, hundreds of boys and girls in foster care leave their worries behind and reclaim some of the great joys of childhood.





## REUNION EVENTS

Happy Trails keeps the fun, community and support going all year long.

## FULL FAMILY EVENTS

Several reunion events are opened up to foster families, relatives and other family members.



## LEARNING ADULTHOOD SKILLS TO SUPPORT OURSELVES (“LASSO”)

Reunion events for youth 14 and older that focus on life skills, college prep and job skills development.

## JUNIOR COUNSELOR

Foster youth ages 16 and 17 gain a sense of responsibility and leadership, while still experiencing the wonders of camp.



## SPRING LEADERSHIP CAMP

Skills-based outdoor adventure program for older youth.

## WINTER CAMP

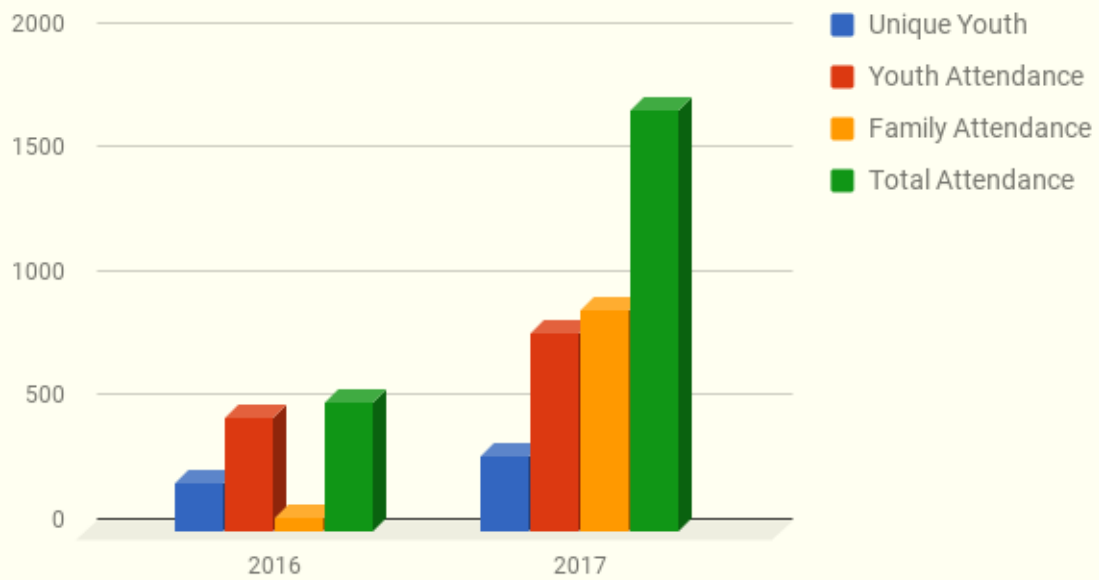
Over the course of 3 fun-filled days, campers experience holiday cheer, friendship and fun.





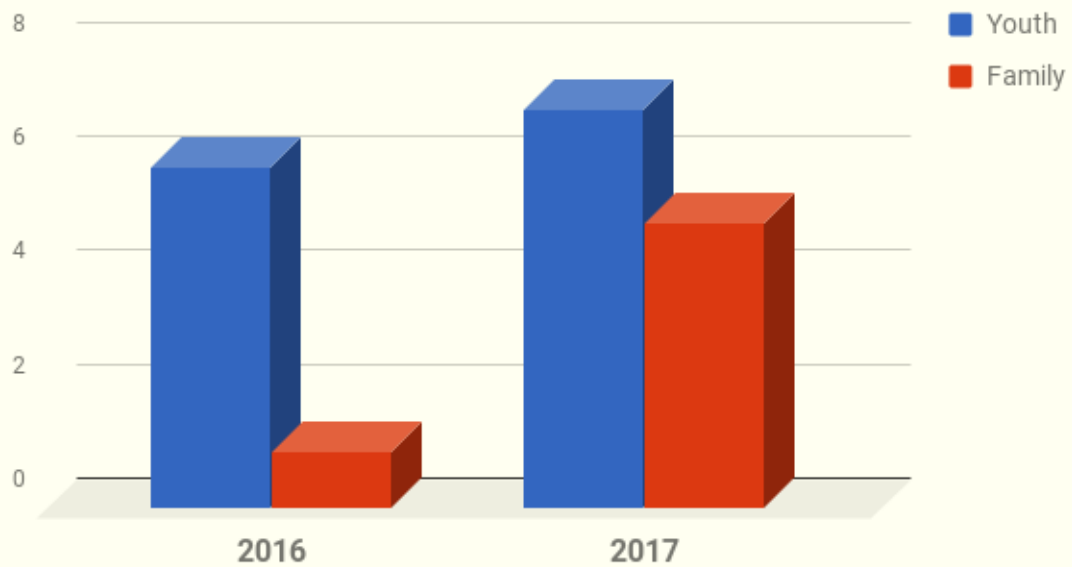
## CAMPING AND PROGRAMMING DATA 2016 / 2017

Attendance By Year





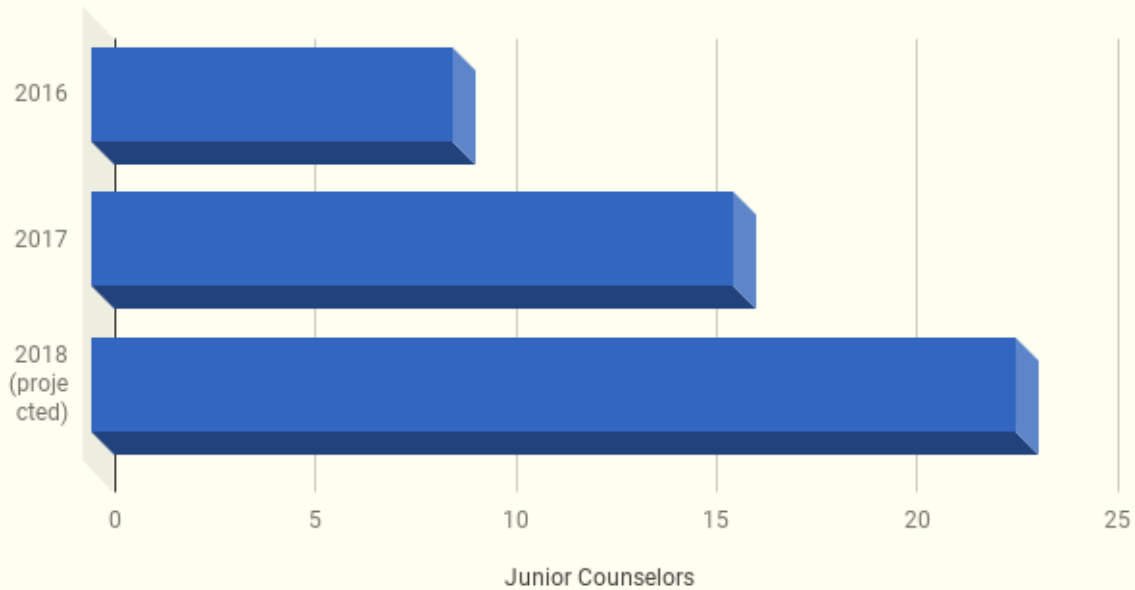
## Events per Year





## SCOPE AND GROWTH OF JUNIOR COUNSELOR AND COUNSELOR PROGRAM

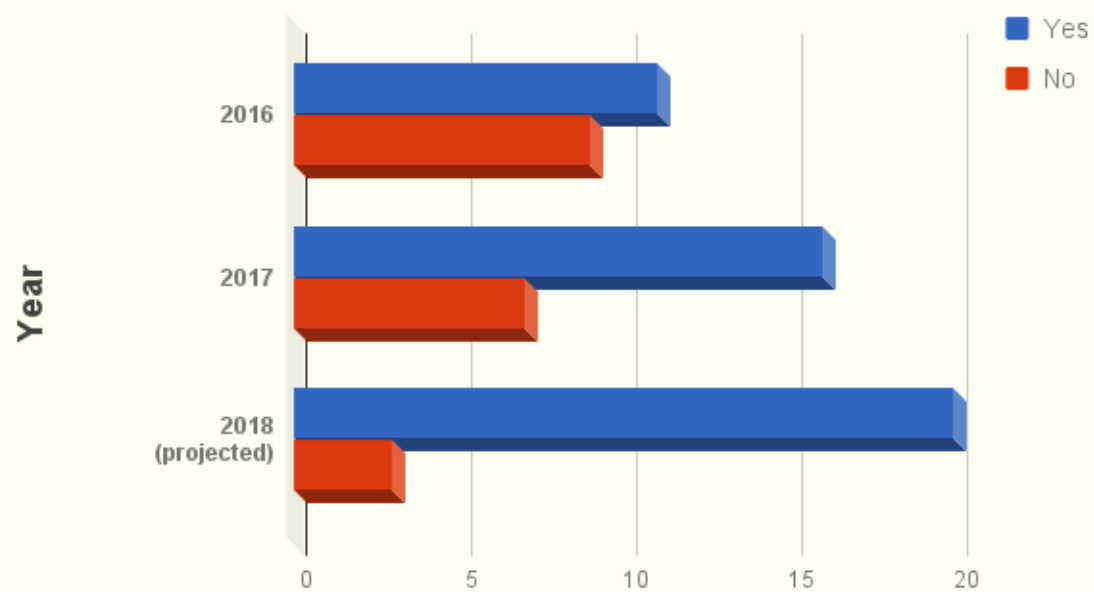
Junior Counselor Growth (Foster Youth/Graduated Campers)







### Counselor Classification: Former Foster Youth





## **TRAILS TO SUCCESS: INVESTING IN OUR CAMPERS AND TRANSFORMING THE FOSTER CARE EXPERIENCE**

Happy Trails for Kids creates a sense of belonging among the children we serve. As campers reach their teen years, the need for connectivity becomes increasingly critical. Under the Trails to Success Initiative, Happy Trails will strengthen the relationships, trust and stability we have already established with campers, and facilitate enhanced programming. The Initiative is grounded on the principles, and most importantly, spirit of camp.

### **BUILDING BLOCKS**

- Year round LASSO Counselor for campers 16 and over
  - Collaboration with existing resources and supports
- Dedicated staff to support and expand Junior Counselor summer program
  - Increased training and leadership opportunities for Junior Counselors
    - Targeted events offered year round



## **GOALS**

### **1. Cultivate Personal Strengths**

By exploring curiosities and creating opportunities to deepen the interests of youth, we hope to propel young people into pathways that are guided by visions, goals and confidence. The promotion and facilitation of age appropriate activities will result in the development of skills and tools helpful in navigating the adult world.

### **2. Peer Relationships**

There is an inherent harmony between the role of a camp counselor and that of a mentor. Under the Trails to Success Initiative, LASSO Counselors will work directly with youth on a year round basis. In addition to providing a peer connection – made more meaningful by the shared experience of foster care – LASSO Counselors will be paired with youth to identify opportunities, overcome barriers, and ultimately guide youth through the trails- some easier than others- towards a more secure and successful path of adulthood.

### **3. Learning Opportunities**

Now, more than ever, there are resources and support to help youth access pathways to higher education and job readiness. Too often, these community resources are not fully utilized or accessed due to real, and perceived, barriers. The Trails to Success Initiative will collaborate with existing resources and offer learning opportunities designed to improve academic achievement and job readiness.

### **4. Outdoor and Cultural Enrichment**

Exposure to nature and the arts evokes inspiration and healing. Under the Trails to Success Initiative, youth will be exposed to unique outdoor and cultural experiences, which will further expand their web of support and engage their hearts, bodies and minds.