



## • Introduction

The **Redlich Horwitz Foundation (RHF)** invests in transformative strategies that ensure children and families can thrive together in well-resourced communities across New York. We oppose oppressive surveillance tactics that fracture families in the name of child welfare. We champion the voices of system-impacted people and advocate for sharing power with those directly affected by government overreach to identify concrete solutions that uphold parental rights and expand community-driven support to families.

This overview presents RHF's refreshed strategic funding vision, including a framework for grantmaking priorities and goals centered on achieving equity and justice for New York families.

## • A Call for Change in Child Welfare

The family policing system (*commonly referred to as "the child welfare system"*) undermines child well-being, family values, and parental rights. New Yorkers under investigation by Child Protective Services (CPS) describe distressing, intrusive interactions that cause irreparable harm to their reputations and unnecessary family upheaval. Despite a substantial decrease in the foster care census, New York continues to subject thousands of falsely accused parents to invasive, lengthy, and traumatic government surveillance each year.

- ❖ **Ambiguous mandated reporting laws lead to excessive calls to the New York State Central Registry (SCR) and needless harassment of families for fear of failure-to-act consequences, such as professional liability.**
- ❖ **In 2022, 76% of initiated CPS investigations (98,621 cases) lacked sufficient evidence to substantiate allegations.**
- ❖ **Only 15% of those investigations related to suspected child abuse; 85% of families were investigated due to accusations of "neglect," which often conflates poverty and race with child endangerment.**

**There is a growing consensus: it's time to reexamine and reimagine our approach to child and family well-being.** A policing response to poverty and entrenched racial bias are incredibly harmful and also waste valuable taxpayer dollars on unwarranted investigations that punish rather than strengthen families.

- ❖ **Recent data indicates that New York State spends roughly \$348 million annually on CPS investigations of innocent families.**

Imagine the good we could do by reallocating this money to meet the basic material needs of struggling families, such as direct cash supports, childcare, safe, affordable housing, and other stabilizing assistance they say will make a difference in their lives. This shift will also relieve the burden on overwhelmed CPS workers when they no longer have to investigate unnecessary calls.

## • A History of Powering Progress and Partnership

Since 2013, RHF has awarded 416 grants to 162 organizations representing an investment of over \$29.3 million. Throughout our history, we have proudly supported program development, system reform, and advocacy initiatives that have improved the lives of children and families. For nearly a decade, the Foundation funded initiatives to improve permanency and education outcomes for children in foster care in New York. We also concentrated on assisting youth in foster care by

## RHF STRATEGIC FUNDING VISION OVERVIEW (continued)

promoting family-based care over institutions, recruiting and retaining kinship families, and expanding educational coaching models and financial aid for transition-age youth.

These local and state efforts led to:

- ❖ Substantial public funding to expand educational supports for foster youth;
- ❖ System partnerships and technical assistance that cut institutional placements in half; and,
- ❖ Replication of effective programs that supported healing, kinship care, and permanency for children across the state.

These milestones reflect fruitful collaborations with extraordinary grantees, partners, and advocates. Together, we made systems more effective and efficient, removed barriers to success for families, and created new opportunities for generations of young people through activism, practice change, and more equitable resource allocation.

In 2020, RHF adopted an anti-racism lens and established core values to acknowledge the unjust disparities and disadvantages experienced by communities of color across New York.

Through research and listening to firsthand accounts, we deepened our understanding of what a knock on the door by CPS leads to – especially for low-income Black and Hispanic families. Again and again, people with lived experience pointed to the weaponization of state child welfare oversight and the coercive policing tactics that damage family bonds and traumatize children and parents caught up in overreaching CPS investigations.

It became evident to us that federal and state laws enacted to prevent child abuse decades ago are now incentivizing state child welfare systems to interfere in the lives of families, including favoring child removal and foster care placement over preserving family integrity.

**A shift in the culture and strategy for keeping children safe is especially urgent, given numerous studies that document the long-term effects of family separation and adverse childhood experiences.** RHF began exploring new ways to address these issues and become a better partner. Our team engaged local leaders, people with lived experience, and advocates across the state in candid conversations about their needs, challenges, and priorities.

Through these discussions, we recognized the value of expanding partnerships and access to philanthropic support for grassroots organizations and coalitions working to build the family justice movement — particularly in communities of color disproportionately impacted by child welfare investigations and especially in regions outside NYC, where private funding for this work is scarce. We are grateful to everyone who contributed to these thoughtful sessions to help shape the direction of RHF’s future grantmaking.

### CORE VALUES

**COLLABORATION.** We respect and learn from impacted youth, families, and community partners as we strive to become more informed and productive allies engaged in transformative work.

**EQUITY.** We prioritize community expertise and inclusion, especially honoring the voices of historically marginalized and oppressed people and communities. We pledge to use an equity lens and acknowledge the profound disadvantages caused by systemic racism in making investments that create opportunities to strengthen our team and grantees.

**JUSTICE.** We are committed to philanthropic strategies that intentionally address inequities to achieve justice for all families affected by the child welfare system.

**SHARED POWER.** We believe in empowering system-impacted people and their communities to frame their challenges, make decisions, and design solutions that inform our investments to support a better approach to child and family well-being.

## RHF STRATEGIC FUNDING VISION OVERVIEW (continued)

### • Trust in Community. Invest in Families.

As we modify our philanthropic approach to reflect community priorities and the expertise of those with lived experience, RHF will continue to be an ally for system change and family success. We back efforts to eliminate racial and socioeconomic discrimination and punitive policies that disrupt children and families. We call for an end to family policing and the expansion of community-driven supports that keep New York families intact and ensure that the small percentage of children at risk of physical harm remain safe and supported.

We believe bold change happens through partnerships with diverse stakeholders. RHF will continue to listen and learn from people with lived experience, child welfare leaders, advocates, legislators, and grassroots organizations working to build community power and redesign more responsive, equitable, and effective family support networks.

### • Grantmaking Strategies to Meet the Moment

RHF will focus more intently on strengthening the growing movement to shrink the scope and scale of family regulation and break the cycle of family disruption, structural racism, and intergenerational trauma inflicted by current CPS policies and practices. Our refreshed funding portfolio follows a **multipart strategic framework** to prioritize investments that expedite and maximize impact. As we deepen investments in three strategic areas, we also acknowledge the need to continue our long-standing commitment to supporting initiatives that help children and youth in and exiting the foster system heal, connect, and grow.

#### **mobilize**

Movement and  
Power Building



#### **influence**

Policy and Advocacy  
Action for Change

BUDGETARY · REGULATORY  
LEGISLATIVE · STRUCTURAL



#### **reimagine**

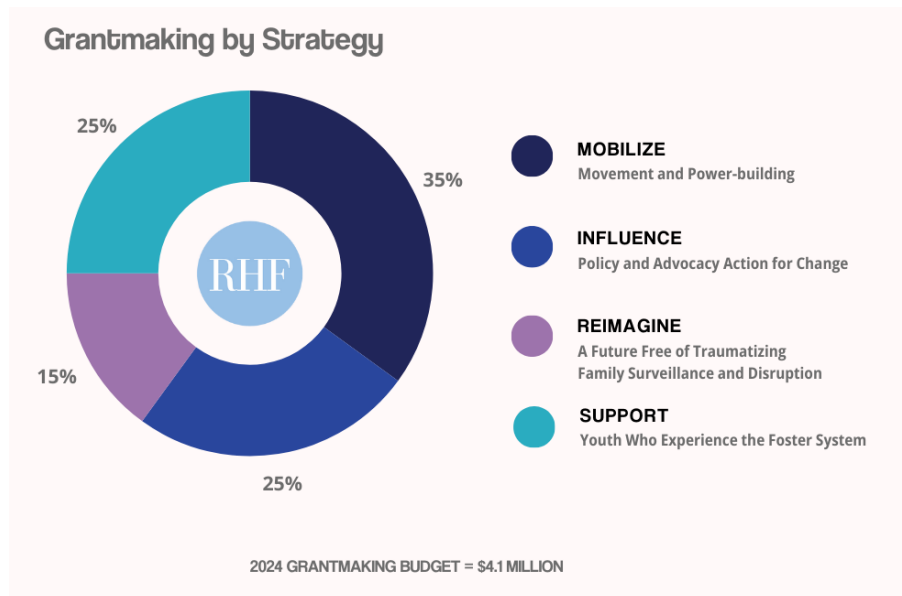
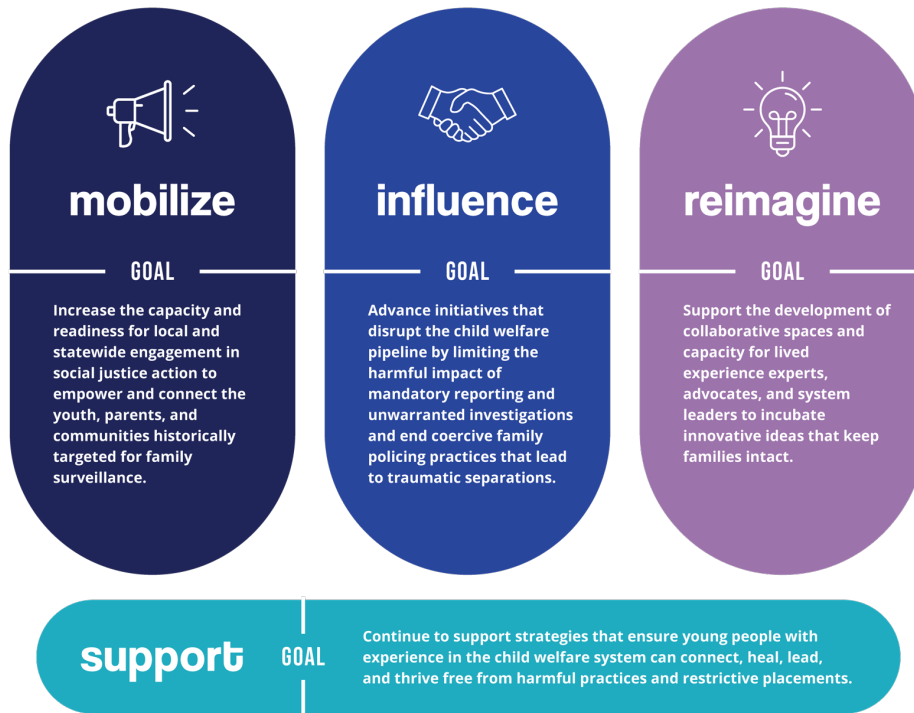
A Future Free of  
Traumatizing Family  
Surveillance and  
Disruption



#### **support**

Youth Who Experience the Foster System

## RHF STRATEGIC FUNDING VISION OVERVIEW (continued)



### • Connect to the Vision

As we prepare our organization to implement this strategic funding vision, we pledge to become a more flexible, transparent, and collaborative partner. Over the next year, we will explore new grantmaking opportunities and structures to infuse more funding into necessary advocacy, storytelling, grassroots movement-building, and lobbying activities. We encourage community organizers, lived experience experts, child advocates, and other philanthropic organizations to join us in the fight for family justice.