



**National Resource Center for
Permanency and Family Connections**
Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College



*A Service of the Children's Bureau
& A Member of the T/TA Network*

INFORMATION PACKET

Extending Foster Care Beyond 18:

Improving Outcomes for Older Youth

By Melissa Stein

May 2012

**Edited by Lyn Ariyakulkan, MSW
NRCPFC Information Services Coordinator**

June 2012

**A Service of the Children's Bureau & A Member of the T/TA Network
2180 Third Avenue, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10035
Fax: 212-396-7640
www.nrcpfc.org**

Introduction

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act was enacted into law in 2008. This Act has been characterized as one of the most influential and transformative pieces of federal legislation on child welfare policy in more than a decade (Mallon, 2010). For older youth in the foster care system, the Fostering Connections Act makes important changes to child welfare policy in order to enhance services for self-sufficiency and the transition to adulthood (Krinsky & Liebmann, 2011).

The Fostering Connections Act recognizes the importance of services for older youth and that the extension of services creates increased opportunities for success and well-being for youth previously in the foster care system. Youth who remain in care past the age of 18 are more likely to obtain a high school diploma, enroll in college, and are far less likely to be victims or perpetrators of crimes (Krinsky & Liebmann, 2011). Studies suggest that creating youth-centered systems, with appropriate services that look towards building strong support networks and teaching life skills, are essential to positive long-term outcomes for vulnerable and at-risk youth.

The language used in the Fostering Connections legislation reflects recognition of the importance of positive adult connections and support for youth in early adulthood instead of the push towards early independence that previously dominated legislation (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). Trends in the general youth population indicate a much later launch into adulthood than previous generations. It is essential for the child welfare system to take this trend into account, to deliver increased age-appropriate and youth-driven services, and provide a network of support in the transition to adulthood.

Statistics and Analysis

Young people formerly in foster care, compared to the general population, experience significantly different outcomes in areas of education, employment, income, and involvement in the criminal justice system, among other measures (Courtney et al., 2010). Extending care for youth and providing them with greater support during their transition into adulthood may lessen the likelihood of negative outcomes and experiences.

Outcomes for Former Foster Care Youth Compared to General Population

<i>OUTCOME</i>	<i>FOSTER CARE (Ages 23 & 24)</i>	<i>GENERAL POPULATION (Ages 23 & 24)</i>
No high school diploma or GED	24.4 %	7.3%
Not Employed	52%	24.5%
Average income from employment	\$12,064	\$20,349
Has Health Insurance	57%	78%
Males who have ever been arrested	81.2%	17.4%
Females who have been pregnant	77%	40.4%

Source: Courtney et al. (2010)

Better Outcomes for Youth Who Remain in Care until Age 21

- Youth required to leave care at age 18 were 2.7% more likely to be homeless than those who had the option of remaining in care until age 21 (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010).
- Young women remaining in care experienced a 38% reduction in the incidence of pregnancy before age 20 (Courtney et al., 2005).
- Remaining in care more than doubled the odds that youth would be working or in school at age 19 (Courtney, 2005).
- Those who remained in care were twice as likely to have completed at least one year of college by age 21 (Peters et al., 2009).

Cost Benefit Analysis

Extending foster care has substantial financial benefits to both youth transitioning out of care and to society. Allowing young people to remain in care until age 21 doubles the percentage who earn a college degree from 10.2% to 20.4%, thereby increasing their potential earnings. Researchers project that a young person formerly in foster care can expect to earn \$481,000 more over their work life with a college degree than with only a high school diploma (Dworsky, 2009). A cost benefit analysis conducted in California found that increasing attainment of a bachelor's degree would return \$2.40 for each dollar spent on extended foster care from ages 18 to 21 (Courtney et al., 2009).

Review of Policy and Legislation

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 made several major improvements to programs and policies for older youth aging out of care. The Fostering Connections Act includes both mandatory changes and options for states to implement to their current foster care programs (Fosteringconnections.org, 2009).

Fostering Connections extends eligibility for Title IV-E payments until age 21 (Children's Bureau, 2011). This allows states to extend foster care services from age 18 until 21 and guarantees federal funding to match states' contributions. The extension of Title IV-E allows youth to make the transition into adulthood while maintaining connections to foster families, relative guardians, or adopted families, and ensures health coverage and other benefits (Fosteringconnections.org, 2009).

Another mandate of Fostering Connections states that youth aging out of the foster care system must complete a transition plan 90 days before discharge. The transition plan must be developed in collaboration with the youth and address issues such as housing, employment services and workforce supports, opportunities for mentors, education, and health insurance. This new law aims to ensure a smoother and safer transition to adulthood for youth who are without a permanent family and also extends eligibility for the Chafee Foster Care Independent Living Program (ILP) services to youth placed in guardianship at age 16 and older (Langford, Flynn-Khan, & Gaughen, 2010).

Additionally, Fostering Connections extends the eligibility for Chafee education and training vouchers to children who are discharged at age 16 and older to kinship guardianship. The extension of these benefits removes a disincentive for youth to be placed with permanent families after age 16 (Langford, Flynn-Khan, & Gaughen, 2010).

Promising Practices

Workforce Academy for Youth - San Diego, California

The idea behind this innovative program stems from the county of San Diego's recognition of the benefits of intergenerational services and programming. The county has launched a variety of programs that combine the energy and vitality of youth with the experience and maturity of seniors (Ben, 2012). This exchange has been found to both empower youth and enhance the lives of participating senior citizens (Ben, 2012).

The Workforce Academy for Youth pairs older adults with youth who are about to age out of the county's foster care system. These adults mentor foster care youth throughout the course of a six-month internship that teaches work and life skills (Ben, 2012). The innovation of this program lies in its ability to use human resources in a way that is resourceful, low cost, and impactful for both groups of participants.

As foster care youth aging out of the system are at high risk for homelessness and unemployment, this mentoring program attempts to give youth both resources and positive adult connections in order to improve their outcomes (Cook, 2009). The Workforce Academy for Youth program reports that there is an 80% completion rate by youth and those who complete the program graduate with the skills necessary to pursue full time employment and higher education opportunities (Cook, 2009).

Transition Plans – New York

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) requires that transition plans be developed 180 days prior to either the youth's eighteenth birthday or 180 days before anticipated discharge date, if youth is remaining in care past their

eighteenth birthday. The transition plan must then be completed 90 days before discharge and include specific options for housing, health insurance, employment, education, mentor opportunities, and continuing support services (New York State Office of Children and Family Service, 2009).

This transition plan functions as a tool to help older youth transition successfully towards adulthood and is intended to be a collaborative effort between youth and caseworker. Plans are intended to support the youth's sense of independence, sense of self, and sense of responsibility, while also connecting them to supportive adults in a way that promotes social support and facilitates a successful transition.

Lighthouse Youth Services Independent Living Program – Ohio

This program accepts male and female youth ages 16-19, including pregnant and parenting teens in the foster care system. Youth are placed in their own apartments in order to help them to acquire the skills necessary for independence and self-sufficiency.

While there is some risk in placing youth in an unrestricted living environment, Lighthouse Youth Services works to provide participants with a strong support network, including encouraging daily conversations with their assigned social worker. The strong emphasis on social support networks is meant to build connections with adults that youth can then call on for support once they are living independently. Additionally, all youth must follow established rules such as curfew, no overnight guests, and a limit of two guests at a time.

As part of the program, youth receive a stipend that covers food, transportation, and personal items. The remaining portion of the stipend is placed in a savings account that is

set up for each participant. If employed and financially stable upon graduation, youth are permitted to keep their apartments. In the event that they do not have a stable source of income at termination, assistance is provided in finding alternative arrangements (Mendel, 2001).

Online Resources

National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (NRCPFC) is a service of the Children's Bureau that provides States, Tribes, and other child welfare agencies with training, technical assistance and information services to promote effective practices for youth transitioning out of care. The NRCPFC dedicates a website section to Fostering Connections, including a webpage on emancipating/older youth.

http://www.nrcpfc.org/fostering_connections/emancipating_older_youth.html

National Resource Center for Youth Development (NRCYD) is a service of the Children's Bureau that provides tools for permanency and transition planning for youth, as well as strategies for engaging youth in planning that creates positive outcomes. Their site also contains a summary of the key elements from the Fostering Connections legislation.

<http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/>

Child Welfare Information Gateway, a service of the Children's Bureau, contains strategies, program reports, and training curricula around the achievement of permanency for youth in foster care.

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/>

FosteringConnections.org provides information, trainings, and tools related to the implementation of The Fostering Connections legislation. The website aims to connect implementers of the law with the latest information and with leading experts working on

the issues through webinars, mailing lists, and other online forums.

<http://www.fosteringconnections.org/>

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative connects advocates, child welfare professionals, researchers, and youth aging out of care with important publications and resources relating to successful transition from foster care to young adulthood. Resources include educational opportunities, health care, housing, and employment.

<http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/>

Foster Club is a national network whose members are comprised of young people in foster care. Their website, created specifically for children in the foster care system, features helpful articles and opportunities for youth to become involved, informed, and independent in their transition towards adulthood. Foster Club makes available a free transition toolkit that provides an overview of the skills, knowledge, and resources needed for young people leaving foster care to prepare for life as young adults.

<http://www.fosterclub.com>

Casey Family Services disseminates evidence-based practices in child welfare at the local, state, and national level. The organization promotes the movement towards family permanence for youth and offers a plethora of permanency focused services for children and youth.

<http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org/>

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