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Large Numbers of Youth in Pennsylvania Foster Care Are Placed in Group Homes, Have Poor Educational and Employment Access, National Report Finds

The Fostering Youth Transitions data brief is the most comprehensive data set ever collected across all 50 states to assess how young people fare transitioning from foster care to adulthood

PENNSYLVANIA — Today The Annie E. Casey Foundation released the *Fostering Youth Transitions*, a data brief that highlights the most comprehensive data set ever collected across all 50 states to assess how young people fare as they transition from foster care to adulthood. The brief gives a snapshot of how young people are served during foster care and leading up to this transition. The national data—and data for Pennsylvania--shows that young people in foster care have great strengths, but are struggling as they enter adulthood. We can and must do more.

“The data shows that we are not adequately preparing older youth in foster care for success as adults. These young people deserve more and are worth our investment,” said Sue Mangold, Chief Executive Officer.

For young people in foster care, the path to adulthood can be filled with more obstacles and detours than the typical young person faces in the world. In its 17 years of working with child welfare leaders, policymakers and young people across the country, the Foundation’s [Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative](#) has uncovered stark data about this population. They face disproportionate levels of unemployment and homelessness, as well as other barriers to well-being — challenges that are greatly exacerbated by race.

The data brief reveals serious challenges in Pennsylvania’s outcomes for youth in foster care that impact how they fare in adulthood. The data show:

- **Far too many youth are placed in group home and institutional care as opposed to more preferred family based placement.** A higher proportion of foster youth in Pennsylvania have recent experience in a group home placements compared to foster youth nationally, 47 percent versus 34 percent.
- **Large numbers of youth are aging out of the foster care system without the skills they need to thrive as adults.**
 - Only 44 percent of Pennsylvania youth experiencing foster care attain full- or part-time employment by the age of 21 as compared with 57% of their peers who are not in foster care.
 - Only 75 percent of Pennsylvania youth experiencing foster care receive their high school diploma or GED by age 21 as compared with 92 percent of their peers who are not in foster care.
- **Large numbers of youth are aging out and not being connected with family.** Among older youth, 32% age out of foster care without being reunited or connected with family.
- **We are not engaging large numbers of youth in extended care services despite their need.** While all youth who reach age 18 in care would benefit from extended care and support, only one in four remain in care a year after their 18th birthday.
- **The challenges faced by youth in foster care are greatly exacerbated by race.** African-Americans are vastly overrepresented in the foster care system. They make up 13 percent of the general population but constitute 43 percent of the foster population. White Pennsylvanians constitute 71 percent of the state population, but only 38 percent of the foster care system.

“We should better prepare youth in the child welfare system for adulthood if they age out, but first and foremost we should prevent them from aging out by finding them family or the support of kin. The young adults we serve tell us that they want family, but feel like the system gives up on them,” said Jenny Pokempner, Director of Child Welfare Policy.

Nearly two decades ago, Congress resolved (through the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999) to track national and state-level data and outcomes around youth who have experienced foster care. Pennsylvania’s policymakers can start by asking tough questions that will help improve a state’s ability to collect and report child welfare data, especially on outcomes for older youth.

“We now have the data to confirm that our systems are not meeting the needs of youth. The data reinforces what most of us have known for many years, youth need the support of family to transition to adulthood successfully. We need to build skills and

competencies, but our laws and policies must make finding permanency and family for older youth an absolute and urgent priority,” said Pokempner.

To remain an innovator and leader in older youth services, Pennsylvania must enhance its law and policies so that older youth in foster care have improved chances of adult success.

Release Information

The *Fostering Youth Transitions* data brief is available at www.aecf.org. For Pennsylvania-specific data, [visit this link](#). The resource, which contains recent, groundbreaking national and state-by-state data on indicators of foster child well-being, is made possible through the [Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative](#) of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Juvenile Law Center advocates for rights, dignity, equity and opportunity for youth in the foster care and justice systems. Founded in 1975, Juvenile Law Center is the first non-profit, public interest law firm for children in the country. We fight for youth through litigation, appellate advocacy and submission of amicus (friend-of-the-court) briefs, policy reform, public education, training, consulting, and strategic communications. Widely published and internationally recognized as leaders in the field, Juvenile Law Center has substantially shaped the development of law and policy on behalf of youth. We strive to ensure that laws, policies, and practices affecting youth advance racial and economic equity and are rooted in research, consistent with children’s unique developmental characteristics, and reflective of international human rights values. For more information about Juvenile Law Center’s work, visit www.JLC.org.

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