

FOSTERING SUCCESSFUL YOUTH TRANSITIONS IN PENNSYLVANIA: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR POSITIVE CHANGE



To make a successful transition to adulthood, all children need a safe environment, connections to family and supportive adults, and opportunities to gain skills related to education, employment and adult living. Unfortunately, youth who are placed in foster care have a disadvantage compared to young adults not in the system, according to the most recent data.

WHO ARE TRANSITION AGE YOUTH?

Transition Age Youth are children age 14 to 21, who are placed in out-of-home care through the Child Welfare System. In November 2018, the Annie E. Casey Foundation produced the first ever national and state-level data set of its kind, through the ***Fostering Youth Transition*** data brief, highlighting how young people fare from foster care to adulthood. This data shows that youth who are placed in foster care face many challenges making the transition to adulthood. They also are falling behind their general population peers and are on track to face higher levels of joblessness and homelessness as adults. **We can change this trend and ensure that youth in care get the support they need to make a successful transition to adulthood and thrive.**

KEY FACTS ABOUT TRANSITION AGE YOUTH:

- 8,639 youth, or 33 percent of Pennsylvania's foster care population are Transition Age Youth.
 - 25 percent of these youth have had two placement changes, and 42 percent have had three or more.
- 47 percent of Transition Age Youth are placed in group or institutional care, rather than family-based settings.
- 49 percent age out of care on their own rather than being reunified or connected with family.
- Only 25 percent of young people in foster care on their 18th birthday will remain in care a year later, although having the right to remain in extended foster care.
- At age 21, only:
 - 44 percent have full or part-time employment
 - 75 percent have obtained their GED or High School Diploma, as compared to 92 percent of their peers
 - 63 percent have stable housing

STEPS TO IMPROVING THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

✓ Make Older Youth Permanency a Priority by Re-Enacting Extended Permanency Subsidies

One of the key components of a successful transition to adulthood is being connected with family and a support system, as it provides the vital material and non-material support that children need through transition to adulthood. Providing financial support through subsidies received by families who adopt and enter guardianships with older youth and health insurance until a youth is age 21 are important strategies to promoting permanency for older youth. On July 18, 2018, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court issued a decision invalidating Act 80 of 2012 as unconstitutionally enacted, and as a result Pennsylvania reverted to termination of adoption and guardianship subsidies to age 18. *Re-enacting extended permanency subsidies is the first step Pennsylvania must take to support permanency efforts for Transition Age Youth.*



✓ Ensure Transition Age Youth are Provided the Supports and Services they Deserve

Transition Age Youth have access to services under the law that can promote a successful transition to adulthood. Sometimes these services are not available, not provided in ways that engage youth or youth do not know about them. *We can improve outcomes for Transition Age Youth by ensuring they receive the following benefits and services, delivered in an effective and youth-friendly manner.*

- Starting at age 14, the county child welfare agency should engage youth in the development of a transition plan to assist with identifying areas of to prepare them for adulthood, including skills related to employment, daily living skills, education, preventative care and housing, among others.
- Youth should be supported in pursuing their education and employment goals and accessing the Chafee Education and Training Voucher to help finance higher education and training.
- Youth of all ages should be provided services to help them find family and permanency. Examples include Child Preparation, Child Profile and Child Specific Recruitment from the Statewide Adoption/Permanency Network.
- Before youth leave the child welfare system at age 18 or older, they should have a discharge/transition plan that ensures that they are prepared for adulthood and have their needs met. This includes notifying the youth of their right to receive aftercare services or remain in foster care until age 21.