

STUDENTS LEFT BEHIND: TRANSITIONING INTO ADULTHOOD FROM FOSTER CARE

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Prevalence Rates

Foster Care

- An estimated 872,000 reported incidences of child abuse and neglect
- Over 500,000 children in foster care in America

Disability

- Almost 13% of all children ages 6 to 14 have at least one disability
- Youth with disabilities are between 1.5 to 3.5 times more likely to have experienced abuse or neglect

Children in Foster Care...

- Are 3 to 6 times more likely to have emotional, behavioral, and developmental issues
- Score 15 to 20% lower on achievement tests
- Twice as many have repeated a grade, changed schools and enrolled in special education
- Only 60% graduate from high school

Educational Instability

- Every time a child changes schools they lose 4 to 6 months of academic achievement
- The average school changes per year is three and it isn't uncommon for a student in foster care to experience more than seven school changes.

Overly Restrictive Environments

- IEPs are often delayed or not followed due to an inability to identify or locate the person who holds educational rights
- Youth in foster care often are placed in overly restrictive group homes, due a lack of therapeutic foster home placements
- Non-public schools operated by group homes or other institutional residential providers.

What you should know: Unique Issues for Youth in Foster Care

Distractions and thoughts of home

Sadness about family separation

Concerns about siblings and parents

Difficulty adjusting to new foster family and school

Coping with multiple losses

Recovering from abuse and neglect

Youth with Disabilities In foster care

Over half of foster youth alumni had mental health problems compared to 22% of general population.

25% had PTSD versus 4% of general population

20% had major depressions versus 10% of general pop.

Social phobia, panic syndrome, and generalized anxiety disorders at higher rates

22% homelessness rate

33% have no health insurance

Only 43% are employed

Less Likely to go to college

- 20% go to college
- Only 5% complete college

Poor Transition Outcomes

High pregnancy Rates

- 50% of females have been pregnant by the age of 19
- Compared to 20% of non-foster peers

Criminal Activity

- 38% have been arrested by the age of 19
- Compared to 7% of non-foster peers

79% of high school students in foster care had college aspirations

12 to 18 months post emancipation

only 55% had graduated from high school

only 9% had entered college and

37% had not obtained a diploma or a GED

Systems perspective: through the eyes of a youth in foster care with a disability

School and special education system

Child welfare system & foster care system

Dependency court system

Health systems

Mental health system most likely

Juvenile Justice System?

Many, Many Examples of System Barriers

- There is almost no alignment of IDEA's IEP transition plan with the transition plan required by the public child welfare system for foster youth.
- Coordination between public education and public child welfare is crucial for ensuring that youth with disabilities who are also in foster care receive the assistance and services they need for successful transition.
- Example: Independent Living Goals must be emphasized about all else.

What you should know: the factors that promote Resilience

- Good communication and problem solving skills
- The ability to recruit substitute caregivers
- Having a talent or hobby that is valued by their elders or peers
- Faith that their own actions can make a positive difference in their lives
- Extended family or support systems in the community that encourage trust
- Autonomy and initiative
- Positive role models (caring neighbors, teachers, elder mentors, youth workers, peers) that reinforce and reward the child's competencies

(Werner, 1995; Masten, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1992; Carlson & Sroufe, 1995).

The importance of connection is amplified for alumni of foster care

- Reasons for disconnection

 - dropping out of school

 - running away from their homes, foster care placements, rehabilitations, and detention centers;

 - failing to take part in societal experiences, such as getting a job, spending time with friends, and joining clubs.

- Lack of consistency or permanency in their family situations means a lack of mentoring and adult guidance.

- Many youth with disabilities can end up feeling isolated, lonely, and even rejected by societal experiences.

PROVIDING QUALITY TRANSITION SERVICES

What are the similarities and differences between student with disabilities in foster care and SWD not in care?



Transition Activities may have the power to . . .

Decreasing hopelessness

Reducing health-risk behaviors

Enhancing relationships with parental figures

Increasing school commitment

We know that most SWD have these barriers to post-secondary educational attainments

- Deficits in study skills such as test preparation, note-taking, and listening comprehension
- Problems with organizational skills
- Difficulties with social interaction
- Deficits in specific academic areas, with reading and written composition being the most frequent
- Low self-esteem
- Higher school dropout rates

All Youth Need

- mental and/or physical health services
- transportation
- tutoring
- financial planning and management
- post-program supports through structured arrangements in postsecondary institutions and adult service agencies
- connections to other services and opportunities

Youth with Disabilities May Also Need

- appropriate assistive technologies
- community orientation and mobility training
- exposure to post-program supports (e.g., independent living centers)
- personal assistance services (e.g., interpreters)
- benefits-planning counseling

Youth in Foster Care May Also Need

- opportunities to obtain a driver's license
- library card, voter registration, birth certificate, or medical records
- adults who can serve as adult systems "navigators"
- transitional and long-term housing
- safety information for personal relationships and independent living
- access to financial aid opportunities for college
- parenting information and childcare
- information on health care
- connections to municipalities
- foster care caseworkers making connections in work and community on behalf of these youth

Post-Secondary Education Resources

Foster Care Independence Act of 1999

- This law established the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP), which enables states to provide independent living programs and services to foster youth “aging out” of the foster care system.

Educational and Training Vouchers (ETV) Program for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care (2002)

- provides education and training funds to those foster youth most likely to be in the system on their 18th birthdays (as well as youth adopted at age 16 or later);
- youth up to age 23 are eligible so long as they are enrolled in a postsecondary education or training program on their 21st birthday.
- provides vouchers worth up to \$5,000 per student per year for the cost of attending these institutions.

Role of the rehabilitation counselor?

We know that youth that experience a caring relationship with an adult are better equipped with the skills necessary to: combat the risk factors in their environment, and achieve at levels beyond the bounds of the cards they were dealt.

Best Practices Discussion

VR Eligibility Case Studies

RESOURCES

- Youth with Disabilities in the Foster Care System: Barriers to Success and Proposed Policy Solutions
http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/2008/FosterCareSystem_Report.html
- Casey Family Programs www.casey.org/ToolsandResources
 - *A Road Map For Learning*
 - *Endless Dreams*
 - *Mythbusting: Breaking Down the Confidentiality and Decision Making Barriers*
 - *It's My Life Guides*

Resources for Alumni of foster Care

Foster Club www.fosterclub.org

Foster Care Alumni of America www.fostercarealumni.org

The National Council on Independent Living www.ncil.org

The National Youth Leadership www.nyln.org