The John H. Chafee
Foster Care
Independence
Program

The Transition Years:

Serving Current and Former Foster Youth Ages Eighteen to Twenty-one

The University of Oklahoma
National Resource Center
for **Youth Services** *College of Continuing Education*

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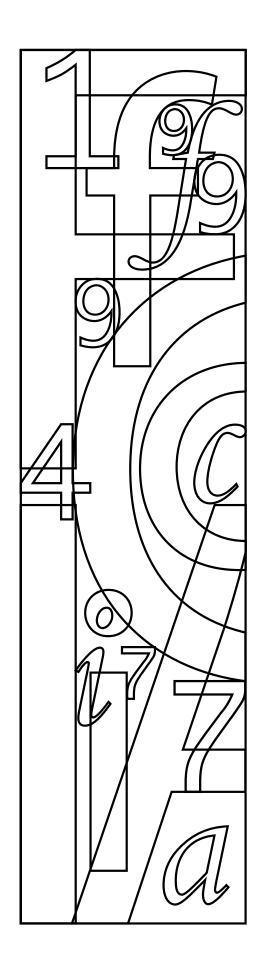Michelle Kessler, MSW
National Resource Center
for Youth Development

Acknowledgements

Preface

In November of 1999, Congress passed the Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA), modifying Section 477 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 677) and creating the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. This legislation increases funding to states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, encourages collaboration within and between the public and private sectors, expands the capacity to provide meaningful aftercare services, mandates the provision of transition services to Indian youth, and creates a new population to be served, the 18-21 year old former foster youth. At the same time, the legislation requires greater accountability through the development of outcome measures, the creation of a standardized performance assessment system, and implementation of a program evaluation strategy.

With the systemic and programmatic changes initiated by FCIA and the increased focus on accountability, public and private child welfare agencies need information on state-of-the-art program approaches and program models. Such information can assist agencies in the development of their own independent living policies and programs. To meet the need for up-to-date information about promising practices, The University of Oklahoma National Resource Center for Youth Development has developed a series of monographs on the following topics:

- Collaboration,

- Tribal Approaches to Transition,

- After Care Services, and

- The Transition Years: Serving Current and Former Foster Youth Ages Eighteen to Twenty-one

Each monograph was developed with the assistance of the New England Network for Child, Youth, and Family Services, the Mid-Atlantic Network for Youth and Family Services, the Southeastern Network of Youth and Family Services, and the Western States Youth Services Network and builds on the work of the Muskie School of Public Services at the University of Southern Maine and the National Resource Center for Youth Services.

The path adolescents take from child-

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Introduction

hood to adulthood is a product of social, economic, political, and technological forces. These forces may facilitate youth becoming healthy adults, or they may leave youth unprepared for adulthood (Mortimer & Larson, 2002). All youth, regardless of their background and upbringing, are expected to navigate adolescence and emerge as healthy, responsible, and contributing citizens.

Many youth who have been raised in foster care experience disadvantages when it comes to preparing for adulthood. Studies increasingly report the positive significance of the parental role in childrearing (Sartor & Youniss, 2002; Reynolds, Walberg & Weissberg, 1999; Carpenter, 2002; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Yet, for many youth in foster care, relationships with biological parents are either strained or non-existent. In addition, research indicates that a sense of stability and support mitigates mental health problems (Ackerson, 2002). Again, many foster youth experience multiple placements (McMillen & Tucker, 1999; Barth, 1990), and often do not feel supported by their caseworker or agency (Shin & Poertner, 2002), or family (Festinger, 1983; Courtney, Piliavin, & Grogan-Kaylor, 1998; Shin & Poertner, 2002).

Although many foster youth experience these multiple disadvantages while coming of age, the field continues to witness resilient youth who make a successful transition to adulthood despite the myriad of obstacles they faced in childhood and adolescence. The strong research base that supports resilience (Janas, 2002; Oddone, 2002; Hurtes & Allen, 2001; Carr & Vandiver, 2001; Lowenthal, 2001) deserves careful attention and practitioners need to help create these realities for youth in their care. In many agencies, this is already happening.

With the passage of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (FCIA), which created the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP), states and agencies now have more opportunity and resources to aid youth in out-of-home care. This legislation expanded the requirement for state services to current and former foster youth to age 21, and provided financial support for providing such services. In addition, the 2001 amendments to the Promoting Safe and Stable Families legislation provide an additional purpose to the program which will allow more educational support for this population to come from the states they currently live in by way of the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program. With legislation and federal budgets currently supporting services to this older population, states and agencies need to be aware of the most effective use of their resources to assist this population.

The National Resource Center for

Youth Development (NRCYD), at the University of Oklahoma, College of Continuing Education conducted a survey of states and agencies to learn how services are currently being delivered to these older youth. This monograph describes some availaåble services, and some current barriers to serving this population. The monograph is structured around the four core principles that NRCYD maintains are critical for the successful delivery of services to youth. These principles are youth development, collaboration, permanent connections, and cultural competence.

In addition, the literature addressing the needs of older youth aging out of care has been reviewed. Information on current trends among the general adolescent population today is presented to help us understand this age group in light of their cultural context and age-group norms.

Literature Review

General Adolescent Independence and Transition

The "age of majority" is a term used by lawyers to describe the time of life after which a person is legally no longer considered a child. In essence, it is an arbitrary time when a child becomes an adult in the eyes of the law. Until fairly recently, the age of majority was set at the age of 21 in most states. Following the ratification of the Twenty-sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution, that gives 18 year olds the right to vote in federal elections, all but a few states lowered their age of majority to 18 (State Bar of California, 2002).

Although the age of majority has been set at 18, researchers, educators, financial counselors and others are realizing that youth aged 18 to 21 are not self-sufficient when they reach the age of majority. These youth require multiple kinds of support. One example of this is reflected in the increase in the age of leaving home. In the general population, older adolescents and young adults are living with parents well past 18 years of age, or they return home, after periods of independence, some, several times. Also, youth in this age group are attaining financial independence later in life. In fact, relatively few Americans under the age of 25 have completed schooling, become economically independent, acquired a residence, and formed a family (Rindfuss, 1991).

In the United States, leaving the family home has been considered a normal life transition. In particular, departure from the parental home, long before marriage, has been treated as a beneficial response to the long-term growth in economic resources, increasing privacy for adjacent generations, and independence (Michael, Fuchs, & Scott, 1980; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1987). In fact, this separation is viewed as the successful transition to adulthood for youth, and there is a sense that anything that helps speed up the process is beneficial. However, one researcher indicates that leaving home at an early age may not be as helpful to youth as previously thought:

Leaving home at an early age has also been associated with lower educational aspirations.

"Enthusiasm for early nest-leaving is prevalent despite the fact that leaving home early in adulthood, when not in conjunction with college attendance, may have many effects on young adults' trajectories into work and family life, some with negative implications for their success and stability. What if some nest-leaving is not "pulled" by the opportunities of greater resources, but is the result of a "push" out of the parental home when young people leave a difficult or unsupportive home environment too early? Those who experience family break-up during childhood may feel that their homes have "left" them

and that there is not enough support for them to stay home for the additional time that might be needed to complete an academic program, establish a base of savings, or test a new relationship" (Aquilino, 2002)

Recent research on the effects of family structure shows that parental family disruption leads not only to children leaving home early (Aquilino, 1991; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1993; Mitchell, Wister, & Burch, 1989), but also to their lower educational attainment (McLanahan, S. & Bumpass, L., 1988), in part through reducing the access young adults have to parental resources (Steelman & Powell, 1989; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1991). Leaving home at an early age has also been associated with lower educational aspirations (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1993).

This may be why many older adolescents and young adults are not leaving home as early as former generations did. Current trends in the U.S. suggest that young adults are increasingly leaving home at later ages, and, more often than not, to form non-family households (Mitchell, 2000). In addition, moving out of the parental home is "reversible," in that young adults can return home to refill the parental nest as "boomerang kids" (Mitchell, 2000). In Canada and the United States, the average age of (first) leaving home is

currently about 19.5, an age that has been on the increase since the 1970s (General Social Survey, 1995; Goldscheider, 1997; Mitchell, 2000). Also, in 1996, over one-third of all unmarried adults aged 25 to 34 were living with one or both parents (Boyd & Norris, 1998). In addition, Aquilino (1991) found that 42.4% of young adults aged 19 to 34 have returned to live at home at least once, for four months or more, after an absence of four months or more.

All this research and data indicate that, in order to attain independence, young people today need the support of family, housing, and financial resources. Independence is not occurring by 18, the magic "age of majority". Though the need is clear, it is still a struggle for advocates to attain these supports for foster youth beyond the age of 18. The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 has helped make some kinds of support a reality, but more needs to be done

The following section explains some of the child welfare legislation related to support for older youth emerging from the foster care system, and the next makes a case for the need for social, financial and other supports for these youth aging out of foster care.

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Impact of Child Welfare Legislation on Older Youth

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, considered the most significant child welfare legislation enacted over the past several decades, is contained in both Title IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The Title IV-B Child Welfare Service Program was originally established to help support initial investigation and law enforcement regarding child abuse and neglect, as well as counseling, parent education, and comprehensive in-home preventive services. Title IV-E, the Federal Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Program, provides support for children who have been separated from families who are unable or unwilling to care for them and who have been placed in out-of-home care: family foster care, kinship care, group homes, residential treatment facilities, or with adoptive families.

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 set the stage for child welfare service provision; strides in independent living legislation came a little later. The following four pieces of child welfare legislation are discussed because of their impact on services to older youth

in care, and aging out of care. These are the Title IV-E Federal Independent Living Initiative, Adoption Safe Families Act of 1997, Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, and the 2001 Amendments to Promoting Safe and Stable Families. In addition, brief attention is given to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act because of the intersection between homelessness and former foster youth.

Title IV-E Federal Independent Living Initiative

At the close of 1984, teens accounted for 46% of the estimated 275,000 children in foster care (Allen, Bonner, & Greenan, 1988). Congressional awareness of the unmet needs of teens in foster care, and the need for increased investments in their behalf, resulted in the enactment of a federal independent living initiative as part of Public Law 99-272, the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985. The Independent Living Initiative was authorized by an amendment to Title IV-E of the Social Security Act of 1985 (P.L. 99-272, Sec. 2307; codified at 42 U.S.C. Sec. 677) [Allen, Bonner, & Greenan, 1988].

The Title IV-E funds were designed to provide a broad range of services and activities designed to:
  – Enable participants to seek a high school diploma or its equivalent or to take part in appropriate vocational training;
  – Provide training in daily living skills, budgeting, locating and maintaining housing, and career planning;
  – Provide for individual and group counseling;
  – Integrate and coordinate services otherwise available to participants;
  – Provide for the establishment of outreach programs to attract youths who are eligible to participate in the program; and
  – Provide each participant a written transitional independent-living plan based on an assessment of his needs and incorporated into his case plan [Allen, Bonner, & Greenan, 1988].

Eligible youth are those aged 16 years and older, and who have been placed in foster care from families who are eligible for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), the program which replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and within the age limits imposed by the state's TANF program. Youth were also required to be living in licensed foster homes, public facilities serving 25 or fewer children, or in private nonprofit facilities. No state or local match was required by the initiative.

This legislation was successful in getting legislators and the public to acknowledge the plight of older youth in care. However, advocates initially had some problems with the legislation. Criticisms of this legislation included its lack of permanent funding authorization, eligibility limited to only IV-E foster care youth, the arbitrary age cutoff

for eligibility, and the restrictiveness of funds particularly related to living arrangements. In 1988 the program was expanded under P.L.100-647 which authorized states to (a) provide independent living services to all foster youth ages 16 to18, (b) provide follow-up services to youth up to six months after discharge, and (c) continue to offer independent living services to youth to age 21, if they wished. In 1993, Congress extended permanent status to the independent living initiative with an allotment of $70 million (Mech, 2003).

Adoption Safe Families Act of 1997

As a result of the growing public concern about safety and permanence for children served by child welfare systems across the United States, Congress passed the Adoption Safe Families Act of 1997. Known as ASFA, the act principally addressed three general perceptions about the child welfare system:

– Children continued to remain too long in foster care;

– The child welfare system was biased toward family preservation at the expense of children's safety and well-being; and

– Inadequate attention and resources were devoted to adoption as a permanent placement option for abused and neglected children (Murray, 2003b).

This act amended Title IV-E to:

– Establish that a "child's health and safety shall be the paramount concern."

– Exempt a state from making reasonable efforts to prevent placement or

to reunify a child with his/her family when certain circumstances exist.

– Require states to make reasonable efforts to secure an adoptive placement for a child whose parents' rights to the child have been terminated.

– Require a judicial permanency hearing for a child no later than 12 months after the date the child entered foster care (P.L. 105-89).

Since ASFA was enacted, adoptions from foster care increased nationwide by 57% (Murray, 2003b). However, due to limited comparison data, the extent to which these trends are a direct result of ASFA is unclear. Also, research on the age groups of youth being adopted has not been established nor were the special needs accompanying the adoption of older youth specifically addressed in this legislation.

Foster Care Independence Act of 1999

The flagship legislation for emancipated and emancipating youth is the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (FCIA), which replaced the former Title IV-E Independent Living Program and created the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. The purpose of the revision was to provide states with flexible funding to assist children likely to "age out" of the foster system at age 18 (Carroll, 2002). FCIA doubled the amount of federal money available to assist states in providing independent living services, and focuses on education, employment, and life skills training.

Additionally, the FCIA:
- Affirms the permanency plans mandated by ASFA and firmly reiterates that independent living is not a permanency plan.
- Allows states to offer independent living services to any child "likely to remain in foster care until age 18" regardless of permanency goal and age.
- Allows the states to offer "room and board" to the older teens that have left foster care and have not yet reached the age of 21.
- Encourages

Not only does FCIA enhance funding and provide a wider eligibility range, it also greatly enhances states' capacity to serve youth aged 18 to 21.

states to provide Medicaid coverage to former foster children through age 21.
- Mandates that states involve community partners in developing programs to ensure the self-sufficiency of older teens transitioning from foster care.
- Establishes a role for young adults in designing their own transition program and requires that they commit to work diligently towards achieving its goals (Carroll, 2002).

Not only does FCIA enhance funding and provide a wider eligibility range, it also greatly enhances states' capacity to serve youth aged 18 to 21. While the Title IV-E Independent Living Initiative did

not target funding for youth transitioning from care, FCIA requires that "states use a portion of their funds for assistance and services for young people ages 18 to 21 who left foster care because they reached age 18" (National Foster Care Awareness Project, 2000). One primary area of assistance for these older youth is room and board payments, which were prohibited by the former Independent Living Initiative. FCIA allows "states to use up to 30% of their program funds for room and board for young people ages 18 to 21 who have left foster care because they reached age 18, but are not yet age 21" (National Foster Care Awareness project, 2000).

Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001

On January 17, 2002, President Bush signed into law the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001 (P.L. 107-133). The new law extends the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSFA) program through 2006. The law also added another purpose to the CFCIP that allows states to provide educational and training vouchers for eligible youth. Forty-two million dollars was earmarked for Chafee Independent Living Education and Training Vouchers under appropriations for FY2003. This Bill was signed into law on February 20, 2003. After a .65%

(.0065) across the board cut for administrative purposes, $41.7 million remains for student vouchers and training.

The PSSFA of 2001 amended section 477 of the Social Security Act to add a new purpose to the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, and adds new subsection (i);

"The following conditions shall apply to a State educational and training voucher program under this section:

(1) Vouchers under the program shall be available to youth otherwise eligible for services under the State program under this section.

(2) For purposes of the voucher program, youths adopted from foster care after attaining age 16 may be considered to be youth otherwise eligible for services under the State program under this section.

(3) The State may allow youths, participating in the voucher program on the date they attain 21 years of age, to remain eligible until they attain 23 years of age, as long as they are enrolled in a postsecondary education or training program and are making satisfactory progress toward completion of that program.

(4) The voucher or vouchers provided for an individual under this section –
   a. Shall be available for the cost of attendance at an institution of higher education as defined in section 102 of the Higher Education Act of 1965; and
   b. Shall not exceed the lesser of $5,000 per year or the total cost of attendance, as defined in section 472 of that Act.

(5) The amount of a voucher under this section shall be disregarded for the purposes of determining the recipient's eligibility for, or the amount of, any other Federal or Federally supported assistance, except that the total amount of educational assistance to a youth under this section and under other Federal and Federally supported programs shall not exceed the total cost of attendance, as defined in section 472 of the Higher Education Act of 1965, and except that the State agency shall take appropriate steps to prevent duplication of benefits under this and other Federal and Federally supported programs.

(6) The program is coordinated with other appropriate education and training programs."

Other Significant Legislation

Runway and homeless youth are disconnected from family, school, and the economy. Youth aging out of foster care and being discharged from the juvenile justice system are at particular risk for homelessness. One study of youth aging out of care found that 12% of the young people had spent at least some time homeless dur-

ing the first year after discharge (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2003; U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2003). An earlier study revealed that 25% of such youth were homeless at least one night (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2003).

The United States Congress enacted the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974) in 1974 following hearings that identified a need for a system of care for young people who had left home. Testimony at the hearings demonstrated that many young runaways left home to escape abuse (Family and Youth Services Bureau 2003). Today, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program (RHY), is authorized by the Missing, Exploited, and Runaway Children Protection Act (P.L. 108-96), administered by the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), and funded at $105 million in FY 2004 (not including the sexual abuse program), and at "such sums as may be necessary" through FY 2008. The allocation going to transitional living programs is increased from 20-30% to 45-55%." (Montana Crime Reporting News, 2003, p.1).

RHY comprises three grant programs; the Basic Center Program (BCP), Transitional Living Program (TLP), and the Street Outreach Program (SOP). Of the three grant programs established by RHY, the Transitional Living Program intersects frequently with youth aging out of foster care, and has services and treatment philosophies similar to those that that states embrace for helping older youth. TLPs are designed to promote a transition to self-sufficient living and to prevent long-term dependency on social services. Services include shelter, counseling in basic life skills, interpersonal skill building, educational achievement, job attainment skills, and mental and physical health care (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2003). These services are available for youth ages 16 to 21 years.

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Need for Chafee Program Services

The need for transition services for older youth (18 to 21), referred to here as Chafee Program services, is not new, surprising, or unknown. There has been reliable documentation, over the years, of pitfalls older youth may experience when aging out of care (Festinger, 1983; Cook, 1988; Courtney & Barth, 1996; Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Taylor & Nesmith, 2001). This realization that the issues are not new is important. While some guidelines for practice have been established (CWLA, 1989), they will likely need to be updated to reflect changes over time.

When discussing the outcomes for older youth in foster care, advocates focus on several domains; mental and physical health, family support and social relationship, residential status and housing, employment and economic stability, education, risky behavior, and criminal behavior. Research in each domain supports the need for Chafee Program services among this population.

Where possible comparisons are drawn to the general population of older youth, 18 to 21, but this data is extremely difficult to locate. Child advocacy groups like Kids Count or Child Trends typically track data only on youth up to age 18. Researchers have an easier time locating youth under age 18 who are generally still engaged in a school program, or living in a home or residential facility. For example, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), a comprehensive national survey that monitors health risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth in the United States, is conducted on a representative sample of 9th through 12th grade students in public and private schools. (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, 2003).

The percentages of former foster youth engaged in risky behavior, requiring mental health services, etc. are compelling whether or not they mirror the general population.

Even without comparison data the findings presented here are not meaningless. The percentages of former foster youth engaged in risky behavior, requiring mental health services, etc. are compelling whether or not they mirror the general population. Where there is comparison data, advocates believe that the data supports the claim that former foster youth are a population at special risk and in need of special supports.

Mental and Physical Health

A substantial number of older foster youth have significant mental health problems. Several research studies have indicated that most adolescents in care suffer psychological, emotional, physical, and social problems stemming from childhood abuse and from their placements within the foster system itself (Chernoff, Risley-Curtiss, Combs-Orme, & Heisler, 1996; Child Welfare League of America, 1998; Clausen, Landsverk, Granger, Chadwick, & Litrownik,1998; Courtney et al., 2001; Fanshel, Finch, & Grundy, 1990; Hulsey & White, 1989; Ingelhart, 1994; Sawyer & Dubowitz, 1994; Thompson & Fuhr, 1992).

Clausen et al. (1998) found that the predominant health problem of youth in their sample was behavioral disorders, while 50% of the sample in the Mech, Ludy-

Dobson, and Hulseman (1994) study had social-emotional adjustment problems. In addition, based on a study of youth 17 years and older discharged from Missouri Division of Family Services, 44% of the sample experienced inpatient psychiatric care (McMillen & Tucker, 1999). It appears that when youth experience mental health problems, they are more likely to experience difficulty taking care of themselves, creating a supportive environment, and being prepared for employment or education. In addition, youth, with a serious emotional disturbance while in transition to adulthood, are a particularly high-risk population. To become successful adults, these youth must master not only the usual developmental tasks of adolescence, but the coping skills needed to counter their emotional disturbances as well (Straka, Tempel, & Epstein, 2002).

The physical health of youth in care depends somewhat on how old they were when they entered care and where they have been placed while in care. For example, the younger children are when they enter care, the less likely they are to have physical health problems (Festinger, 1983; Jones & Moses, 1984), and adolescents in out-of-home care, who had received care at a younger age, were less likely to have health problems (Festinger, 1983). Youth in group homes or facilities were likely to have poorer health than those placed in family foster homes (Festinger, 1983).

Other factors have been identified as influencing the physical health of older foster youth. A study by Courtney et al. (1998) found that African-American foster youth had fewer health problems than the general population, but that white foster youth had more health problems. Festinger (1983) found that adolescents who received a high school diploma before leaving care and those who maintained contact with their foster family after discharge were less likely to have health problems. In Illinois, 16% of older foster youth (age 17.5 and older) were found to have a medical, developmental or behavioral need which would make it difficult to achieve self-sufficiency (Leathers & Testa, 1999).

Chafee Program services are needed to help older youth deal with both mental and physical health issues that may negatively impact their successful transition to adulthood and independent living.

Family Support and Social Relationships

Family support and social relationships are crucial to successful and happy living. Yet, the majority of studies show a low level of family support for older youth in care (Festinger, 1983; Jones & Moses, 1984; Cook, 1992), and particularly for adolescents whose placement type is group care (Altshuler & Poertner, 2001).

In a study by Courtney et al. (2001) that used a self-report method, young adults in out-of-home care reported high levels of social support from significant others, friends, and foster family, but not from biological family. Yet, in a follow-up study, older youth indicated that they perceived

their family members as a significant source of support and reported that their families played an important role in their lives. This contradiction may indicate some of the complexity that surrounds the relationships between foster youth and their biological families. Staff and researchers who have maintained contact with discharged youth know that some experience great emotional difficulty after leaving care (Beyer and Jaklitsch, 1991); Anderson and Simonitch, 1981; Courtney et al.(1998).

Anderson and Simonitsch (1981) described a reactive depression to emancipation involving low and despondent feelings, diminution of activity, loss of initiative, apprehension, general pessimism, gradual constriction of interests, difficulty in concentration, conflict between "letting go" and "holding on", susceptibility to self-esteem breakdown and more, including sleep disturbances. They described this reaction as a four-stage process. The first stage is anxiety accompanying the loss of significant adults and low frustration tolerance. The next stage is elation, when the youth go to live in their own apartments. Usually, elation lasts no more than a month, and is quickly followed by shock, disbelief and feelings of helplessness and disappointment. The third stage is fear and loneliness, during

Courtney et al. (1998) found that 40% of youth communicate with foster parents weekly.

which the youth struggles to maintain job and apartment and put into practice the independent living skills. It is critical that youth are helped to establish, reactivate, and sustain supporting relationships in this stage. The fourth stage is quiet confidence. The transition to this stage is gradual and accomplished through resolution of the reactive depression. It may take from six months to a year to achieve the sustained, realistic feeling of independence that marks emancipation. These emotional issues, as well as the developmental struggles related to identity and separation, lead many youth back to their biological families after leaving care. For some of these young people, attempts to reunify with family members can be disappointing, even devastating, as youth may face rejection, violence, pleas for money, and sometimes re-victimization.

Foster parents often play a supportive role in the lives of former foster youth after their discharge from care. Courtney et al. (1998) found that 40% of youth communicate with foster parents weekly. Connection with siblings is also important to foster youth. Research in this area is limited and youth advisory boards indicate a need for the field to do more to support sibling connections for youth in foster care. Some action that has been taken,

for example, is that California enacted a bill of rights for foster children in 2001 (California Codes Welfare and Institutions Code Section 16000-16012, 16001) and the Illinois Statewide Youth Advisory Board is currently working on proposing legislation on a Sibling Bill of Rights (Child and Family Research Center, 2003).

Adults who have been in out-of-home care as youth are more at risk to report lower levels of received social support (Cook, 1992), and this risk is intensified for males, youth who enter care relatively late (Festinger, 1983), whose social and behavioral problems are severe (Jones & Moses, 1984), and for those whose placement type is group care (Altshuler & Poertner, 2002; Festinger, 1983).

> *... a study in Baltimore County, Maryland reported 80% of former youth in care were living with their parents or relatives after leaving out-of-home care (Scannapieco, M., Schagrin, J. & Ciavaglia, A., 1995).*

Chafee Program services are needed to help youth establish positive permanent connections prior to leaving care, so that social support and relationships are in place when youth are living on their own.

Residential Status and Housing

Many older foster youth return to live with family members or other relatives when they age out of care. A study by Westat (1990) indicated that 54% of older youth reported living with family members after exiting care. And, a study in Baltimore County, Maryland reported 80% of former youth in care were living with their parents or relatives after leaving out-of-home care (Scannapieco, M., Schagrin, J. & Ciavaglia, A., 1995). This is especially interesting in light of research (Courtney et. al., 2001; Altshuler & Poertner, 2002; Festinger, 1983) that shows perceived family support as low for this population. In addition, two years after leaving care, only a few older youth were living on their own (Westat, 1990).

In Missouri, 26% of older youth were living with relatives (non-licensed providers), 22% in their own apartment, college dorm, or military barracks, and 9% were living in a non-kinship foster home at the exit from out-of-home care (McMillen & Tucker, 1999). Homelessness is a problem for some youth aging out of care (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2003). The Foster Care Independence Act allows 30% of the Chafee Program funds to be utilized for "room and board", or housing options for youth 18 to 21 that have "left foster care because they have attained 18 years of age and have not yet attained 21 years of age." [See John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, Section 477(b) (3) (c)] (National Foster Care Awareness

Project 2000). It is clear, in the legislation, that this room and board allotment is a benefit for 18 to 21 year olds, and that federal money is not to be expended on room and board for youth under 18 years of age. Youth exiting out-of-home care at age 17 or 18 need the financial support and other services related to housing that the Chafee Program services can provide.

Employment and Economic Stability

Employment for older youth tends to be sporadic, and some have never held a job. In the Courtney et al. (2001) study, 80% of youth had held a job at some time, and 57% were currently holding a job. In a study in Missouri, 38% of the youth held a job at the time of discharge, and 29% had no employment experience (McMillen & Tucker, 1999). Scannapieco et al. (1995) in Baltimore County found that 39% of youth left care employed.

Data from the general population indicates that former foster youth are at significant risk in this domain. In 1998, 8% of the nation's 16 to 19 year olds were neither in school nor working (Child Stats, 1999). This data shows that older youth, even in the general population, are at higher risk for unemployment. Youth ages 18 to 19 are three times more likely to be unemployed

than youth ages 16 to 17. In 1998, 13 % of youth 18 to 19 were neither enrolled in school nor working compared to 4% of youth ages 16 to 17 (Child Stats 1999).

Chafee Program services are needed to assist youth with employment. For those about to leave foster care, sound preparation to make employment decisions is critical. Preparing youth to work must be a treatment concern for foster programs serving older adolescents. Youth should leave care with the basic components of employability:

Preparing youth to work must be a treatment concern for foster programs serving older adolescents.

– Basic educational skills: reading, writing, computation, and speaking ability)
– Pre-employment skills: job-finding, application, and interview techniques)
– Work maturity: (sound work habits and knowledge of workplace behavior), and
– Marketable skills: (knowledge and skill related to a particular trade or field of work) ([Pritchard et. al., 1984)].

Education

There is a discrepancy in the research as to how many older youth in care earn a high school diploma, or GED. For example, Scannepieco et al. (1995) reports a 31% high school completion rate among adolescents in care, and Cook and Ansell (1986) and Westat (1990) found 31% left care as high school graduates (includes

GED). McMillen and Tucker (1999) argue, however, that these studies examined older foster youth who left care before "their age-mates graduated from high school." An additional study found that 74% of the youth who left care at age 21 had completed high school or earned a GED (Mallon, 1998). In the end, youth who completed high school before leaving care appeared more likely to have a steady job (McMillen & Tucker, 1999).

Many studies, however, do consistently report a lower level of school achievement that, in turn, negatively impacts many domains of life after independence. Prosser (1997) found that youth raised in foster care have lower educational achievement than those who grow up with biological parents, and White, Carrington, & Freeman, (1990) found that youth in foster care are less likely to perform at or above their grade level compared to their peers. In addition, more foster youth required an Individualized Educational Plan (I.E.P.) because they were often identified as having emotional disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and/or learning disabilities, and behavioral difficulties (Carey et. al., 1990). More specifically, a study in Illinois found that 61% of foster youth failed a subject in the last two years, but 20% were on the honor roll (Shin &

> *Placement type seems to have a bearing on substance use and misuse and risk behavior.*

Poertner, 2001). When assessed by the WRAT-R, 37% read between the 2nd and 5th grade level, and 20% read at 12th grade level or higher (Shin & Poertner, 2001).

Youth in care, and aging out of care, need the support that Chafee Program services and the Education and Training Voucher Program can provide for enhancing educational opportunities and employment preparation through learning.

Risk Behavior

Alcohol and illegal drug use is a significant issue for older youth. More than half of all adolescents raised in care have used illegal drugs and alcohol (Nixon & Jones, 1998), while the rate of illegal drug use in the general population is much lower. The Center for Disease Control (2003) reports 9% of youth ages 10 to 24 report ever using cocaine, and 15% in this same age group report ever sniffing or inhaling intoxicating substances. Alcohol use in the general public is higher with 30% of youth ages 10 to 24 reporting "episodic heavy drinking in the last month" (CDC, 2003). Older youth raised in foster care are more likely to get involved with drug and alcohol abuse, delinquency and criminal activities (Shin & Poertner, 2002; Courtney et al., 1998; McMillen & Tucker, 1999). In Illinois, 5% of older youth in care (age 17.5 and older)

had a serious drug problem (Leathers & Testa, 1999).

Placement type seems to have a bearing on substance use and misuse and risk behavior. Adolescents in group homes exhibit the highest level of risk behaviors, while youth in kinship care and non-related foster care showed levels of risk similar to the general population (Altshuler & Poertner, 2002).

Older youth in care tend to exhibit risky behaviors that increase the likelihood of their harming themselves or others. In Wisconsin, 75% of a research sample had committed a delinquent act at least once (Courtney et. al., 1998). In Missouri, 21% of non-Caucasian males and 18% of Caucasian males had been involved with criminal activities, while 2% of Caucasian females and 6% of non-Caucasian females had been arrested (McMillen & Tucker, 1999). In Illinois, 40% of a sample reported that they had run away from home, 36% had hit someone with the intent of hurting them, 18% had carried a hidden weapon, 33% had driven on a public road without a valid driver license, and 17% had reported that they had been involved in a gang fight at least once (Shin & Poertner, 2002).

Chafee Program services are needed to mitigate substance abuse and misuse and

...programs struggle to locate youth who move frequently, and rarely leave forwarding information.

other risk taking behavior among youth aging out of foster care.

Barriers and Solutions to Providing Services for Population

Evidence has established that CFCIP services are crucial for older youth aging out of care. In the domains of health, relationship, employment, education, and risk-taking behavior, these youth have multiple disadvantages when struggling to achieve in the adult world. Chafee Program services are needed to help mitigate these disadvantages. Some of the barriers to providing services include locating youth, youth's distrust of bureaucracy, prohibitive policies, and disjointed adult services.

Efforts to locate youth who have left the child welfare system often fail. Whether for the purpose of offering aftercare services or for research, programs struggle to locate youth who move frequently, and rarely leave forwarding information. The Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (2000) report found that of 10 agencies questioned, only two could provide any data on youth discharged from care. This may be partly because many youth leave

care in an unplanned manner, often suddenly, despite the casework planning efforts of program staff. Youth move from apartment to apartment or state to state, make it difficult to locate them after they age out. Youth may not know that they are entitled to services after leaving care, and caseworkers are often too overloaded with work or lacking in resources to locate the youth to make these services available.

Another challenge to providing services to youth who have left care, has been responding to the attitude of many youth who want nothing more to do with "the system" (Wedeven, Pecors, Hurwitz, Howell, & Newell, 1994).

It is part of normal child /adolescent development to want to assert independence at this stage. Many youth leave care, at their decision, before their 18th birthdays, but many youth do not realize the difficulties of independent living, and think they can do it on their own with no support. Then, when they realize they may need assistance, they find barriers to accessing services. Policy may not allow a youth who has left the system to "come back into care." Many states now have swinging-door policies, but others do not (National Resource Center for Youth

Many youth leave care, at their decision, before their 18th birthdays, but many youth do not realize the difficulties of independent living, and think they can do it on their own with no support.

Services, 2003). Also, youth may not know that programs and services will still be available to them after they've reached 18.

Disjointed delivery of services is another barrier. Gaps exist that leave many foster youth 18 to 21 vulnerable to falling through cracks in services. Youth with serious emotional disturbance (SED), who are engaged in the transition to adulthood, are a particularly high risk population because neither child nor adult service systems claim responsibility for helping these youth move from one system to the other, so the youth make the transition to adulthood alone and without supportive services (Straka, Tempel, & Epstein, 2002). Research has shown that youth 18 to 25, with mental illness, may voluntarily discontinue their treatment and/or reject the idea of living with older mentally ill adults (Straka et al., 2001). This indicates a need for age-appropriate, youth defined resources targeted at this age group. For example, a supervised setting designated for youth only, separate and distinct from supportive housing for adults, is one model recommended to meet the housing, social and psychological needs of older adolescents "aging out" of residential treatment facilities (Straka et al., 2002).

Although barriers to serving this older

population exist, they are not insurmountable. Communication is the key. One tactic for keeping in touch with youth is to have an adult, with whom the youth has a permanent relationship, maintain contact information for the youth. The caseworker, or agency, could then keep a list of just these adults; the assumption being that these adults are is more likely to stay at one address, or to notify the agency when they move. It is easier for the agency to not have to keep up with the many moves of young people and this encourages the establishment of a permanent relationship between the youth and an adult. Ideally, the worker and youth work together to meet the youth's goal for more education or career development, and the caseworker informs youth about the ETV program or other services available for 18 to 21 year olds, all before the youth leaves care.

Methods

During the summer of 2001, the National Resource Center for Youth Development (NRCYD) conducted a broad survey of 300 independent living and transitional living programs around the United States. Most of the programs selected to participate in the survey were recommended by state independent living coordinators. Determined efforts were also made to include the vast majority of federally funded transitional living programs which help homeless youth make the transition to adulthood (Family

and Youth Services Bureau, 2003). The NRCYD survey focused on four topics related to independent living services for youth leaving foster care, each of which is treated in a separate monograph. The topics were: community collaboration; services to 18 to 21 year olds (this monograph), aftercare services and tribal approaches to transition.

In addition, in 2003, state independent living coordinators were surveyed approximately every month, via an e-mail distribution list, to obtain information on state policies related to services for this older population. Survey results address: services to 18-21 year olds, swinging-door policies, educational assistance, and mentoring programs.

This collaborative effort to collect information on independent living and transitional living programs was coordinated by the National Resource Center for Youth Development at the University of Oklahoma, College of Continuing Education. Partnerships were established among the New England Network for Child, Youth, and Family Services, the Mid-Atlantic Network for Youth and Family Services, the Southeastern Network of Youth and Family Services, and the Western States Youth Services Network. This work builds on the collaborative work of the Muskie School of Public Services at the University of Southern Maine and the National Resource Center for Youth Services. The creation of the John H. Chafee Foster

Care Independence Program in 1999, was the motivating factor for this study.

Results

Effective independent and transitional living programs incorporate, into their services and policies, the four core principles identified by the study at the Muskie School cited above. These core principles are: Youth Development Philosophy, Cultural Competence, Permanent Connections and Collaboration. This section begins with an overview of the efforts states have made to deal with eligibility requirements, formalize policies, and keep services flexible for the 18 to 21 age group. Following this overview, the four core principles are defined, and examples of applications of each principle in practice are given.

Overview of Some State Policies

Since the passage of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, many states have established open and non-restrictive policies for serving youth, ages 18 to 21. Some states have even passed state-specific legislation clarifying definitions and service options that the Chafee Program had left to state's discretion. For example, Ohio's administrative rule sets parameters for spending Chafee funds for 18 to 21 year olds, based on House Bill 38, (NRCYD 2003a). Ohio's social service system is state-supervised and county-administered, there-fore great latitude has been given to local agencies.

Even when states have not formally created legislation for services to older youth, they and partner agencies still strive to provide necessary services to this population. For example, in Massachusetts the Chafee Program (NRCYD, 2003a) funds are used to provide the following to youth ages 18 to 21 who have left foster care:

– *Discharge Support Program* - provides up to $1500 per youth for first month's rent, security deposit, utilities, household items, etc. Youth must be employed or otherwise able to afford continuing rental expenses. Outreach workers assist youth in locating employment, housing, etc.

– *Transitional Living Program* - provides housing and the supportive services of an independent living program to help former foster youth develop the skills and resources to live independently. There are 9 slots statewide.

– *Outreach Program* provides the individualized life skills assessment and training, support for job readiness, job seeking, education, housing, identification of a support system, etc.

State funds augment Chafee Program funds and provide:

– *Tuition Waiver Program* - waives the state college/university tuition for former foster youth who were in the agency's custody for protective reasons (Care & Protection custody) and were not able to return home upon discharge at age

18 or older.

– *Foster Child Grant Program* provides up to $6000 per year of financial aid at any public or private college, university or vocational training school for the same population as the tuition waiver.

In New Mexico, 18- to 21-year-olds may sign a contract to receive continued care through the Children, Youth and Families Department, Protective Services Division (NRCYD, 2003a). The contract must contain at a minimum:

a) a description of the youth's living environment;

b) a contact agreement between a youth and his/her social worker;

c) details of an education, work, and/or treatment plan;

d) an outline of prohibited behaviors;

e) a way to access medical care;

f) an outline of activities for which each party is responsible;

g) identification of the youth's support system;

h) an emergency response plan to assist the youth.

The youth may receive $467/month (or the current approved rate) as reimbursement for living expenses, which includes clothing. The youth may receive a clothing voucher prior to starting school, beginning a new job, or in other special circumstances. The youth may receive a Christmas check of $50.00 (or the current approved rate).

When a youth is ready to set up a domicile, he/she may apply for up to $1500 in start up funds, with approval from the program manager of the independent living program. Start up funds are for household items, deposits, and other initial rent or move-in costs.

If a youth breaks the contract, then he/she receives no benefits. However, the youth may ask for an administrative review to reinstate his/her participation in the program. Youth may voluntarily elect to discontinue the program.

Other states are even less formal than New Mexico in their service provision to this age group. In New Mexico, the contract is required, but in Minnesota, no contract is required, and youth ages 18 to 21 are eligible for any and all of the same services available to youth under 18.

Many states have also found that there is a need to set parameters and requirements for service availability and provision. Most states, even though necessity requires boundaries, try to be inclusive of all youth who may need assistance, and to be flexible in the types of services they provide. For example, Oregon has not put any special "boundaries" on the spending for youth age 18 and older. A youth who has been in foster care (care & custody with the state or tribal child welfare) for 180 days since age 14, is eligible to receive ILP services until his/her 21st birthday (NRCYD, 2003a). Two states with service restrictions are Wisconsin and Minnesota. In Wisconsin, youth leaving care prior to age 18 are not eligible for room and board financial assistance, but continue to be eligible for all

other areas of independent living services and supports (NRCYD, 2003a). As mentioned previously, the Chafee foster Care Independence Program legislation is clear that none of the funds that states receive under the Act may be used for room and board services for young people under the age of 18.

(National Foster Care Awareness Project, 2000.) Minnesota does not allow the purchase of cars with Chafee funds, but does allow the funds to be used to help with car insurance and car repair and maintenance (NRCYD, 2003a).

Core Principles

Youth Development

In March, 1998, the executives of The National Collaboration for Youth Members approved the following definition: **"Youth Development,** noun. A process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them become socially, morally, emotionally, physically and cognitively competent. Positive youth development addresses the broader developmental needs of youth, in contrast to deficit-based models which focus solely on youth problems" (National Youth Development Information Center [NYDIC], 2003).

Westat (1991) found that independent living services that target specified youth needs and outcomes achieve the best results. Based upon results from a pilot

Four Core Principles

1. Youth Development

A process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent. Positive youth development addresses the broader developmental needs of youth, in contrast to deficit-based models which focus solely on youth problems. (National Collaboration of Youth Members)

2. Collaboration

The process by which several agencies or organizations make a formal, sustained commitment to work together to accomplish a common mission. (The Community Collaboration Manual, National Assembly of National Voluntary Health and Social Welfare Organizations.)

3. Culture Competence

Culture is difference in race, ethnicity, nationality, religion/spirituality, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, physical ability, language, beliefs, values, behavior patterns, or customs among various groups within a community, organization, or nation. (A Guide To Enhancing Cultural Competency of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs, HHS, ACF, ACYF)

Gaining cultural competence is a long-term process of expanding horizons, thinking critically about the issues of power and oppression, and acting appropriately." Culturally competent individuals have a mixture of beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills that help them establish trust and communicate with others. (Advocates for Youth)

4. Permanent Connections

Positive relationships that are intended to last a life-time. They may be either formal (e.g. adoption or reunification with family) or informal in nature (e.g., mentors or peer support groups). Very often they are identified by the youth. (National Resource Center for Youth Services)

study, Nollan, Downs, Wolf, and Lamont (1996) recommend that life skills assessment tools be designed for youth across an age continuum and be structured to involve participation from both youth and caregivers. A follow-up study by Nollan (2000) underscored the need for a systematic life skills assessment involving both youth and caregivers, stating that "assessment information gathered in this manner helps independent living programs meet the requirement of the [Chafee Program] Act that youth directly participate in the design of their program activities".

Successful transition to adulthood depends, to a large degree, on a youth's ability to make appropriate decisions and to implement them through the case plan. Youth who have strong self-esteem and who feel empowered are often better equipped to deal with the barriers, as well as the opportunities, that arise during and after out-of-home care. By encouraging youth and adults to become partners in making decisions, youth learn to take responsibility for themselves and, thus, feel empowered. This philosophy lies at the core of the youth development approach. Therefore, in order to provide effective services and achieve positive, desired outcomes for older foster youth, it is imperative that both public and private independent living/transitional living providers embrace the youth development philosophy and involve youth in their own case assessment and planning, and, further, in overall independent living policy and program development, implementation, and evaluation.

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Example Programs/Youth Development

A current mechanism for incorporating the youth development philosophy into agency and legislative activity is the development of state and regional youth advisory boards.

In Maine, there are a statewide Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT) and six regional groups overseen by Life Skills Educators. Approximately 50 youth in care, ages 15 to 21, as well as some former youth in care, are actively involved in YLAT. The Independent Living Coordinator for Maine reports that, "the older youth are great role models for younger youth leadership members. Incentives for participation have not been necessary as youth are quite excited about having a voice in the foster care system, and having the ability to give something meaningful for the benefit of all children and young adults in foster care." The state is very respectful of their time commitment, and plan youth leadership activities

and events to accommodate school, work schedules, and other social and extracurricular activities (NRCYD, 2003b).The youth are paid a stipend for appearing on a panel or making any other type of public presentation regarding IL services.

Michigan does not have a state-based youth advisory board as of this writing. Nevertheless, the youth voice is being heard through the efforts of several county-based and/or contracted independent living service providers who include youth advisors in their independent living services. New contracts are mandated to include a youth advisory committee for their program. Michigan is fortunate to be the recipient of a grant from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. This grant is being used to develop independent living programs in 10 counties in the lower peninsula of Northwest Michigan, and also in Wayne County. The Jim Casey grant is a 'youth driven' program that includes youth advisory boards in the plan. Representatives from the various advisory boards in the state will be able to convene to discuss issues and make recommendations for changes to the current statewide independent living service.

Incentives are used to encourage attendance and participation in the Michigan

Every attempt is made to hold youth board meetings outside of school hours, after school or on weekends for the most part.

program. The Casey grant pays stipends to youth for attendance. Other incentive options for participation include meals, or gift certificates to local establishments. Every attempt is made to hold youth board meetings outside of school hours, after school or on weekends for the most part. On the rare occasion when a group must meet during the school day, for example, to attend and/or make a presentation at a legislative session, students will be excused from school (NRCYD, 2003b).

Transportation service varies depending on the area where the youth boards meet. If public transportation is available and safe, youth are encouraged to use the system since this is a good skill to develop for independence. In cases where there is no public transportation available, transportation may be provided by the contractor or the focus group coordinator. Foster parents, too, are sometimes recruited to provide transportation.

Contractors are required to recruit youth for participation by contacting case workers and other agencies that work with eligible youth. An IL worker in Michigan reports that "The Casey project has discovered so much enthusiasm among youth for participation in the focus groups, there may not be enough room for all of the youth

who wish to participate at this time. But, as the program expands, efforts to include any youth who wishes to participate will be made" (NRCYD, 2003b).

In Hawaii the youth advisory board is called the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition (HFYC). It is very active and very visible, and is good example of a state encouraging and supporting youth by implementing policy that supports positive youth development. Here are some of the things going on there: the governor asked HFYC for input regarding a new appointment for DHS; youth testified before the legislature in support of sibling visitation; youth often participate in conferences as speakers and panel members. The Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition has successfully organized a joint Foster Parent and Youth Conference (NRCYD, 2003b).

A foundation planning grant from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiatives provides money for HFYC to pay stipends to youth for taking time to come to planning meetings and to participate in the coalition. The Chafee Program provides funds for hotel expenses, meals, and transportation for the youth. This monetary support is available only for the state board and not for the regional boards.

The state board meets once per quarter on a weekend. The local boards meet as needed. The Independent Living Program has POS (Purchase of Service) contractors on each island that help facilitate board activities as best they can. Sometimes this means providing transportation to meetings. The IL Coordinator for Hawaii reported that: initial recruitment to the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition was done through an annual spring youth conference. For the past four years recruitment has not been a concern for the board because so many youth are very eager to participate (NRCYD, 2003b).

The California Youth Connection (CYC), unlike most state youth leadership groups, is an advocacy organization run by current and former foster youth. There are 22 active chapters in California with more than 250 members, ages 14 to 24. CYC teaches leadership skills and provides an opportunity to put these skills to work within California and across the nation. CYC members are often called upon to address legislative committees and to review and comment on proposed policies (California Youth Connection, Factsheet, 2003).

Youth development philosophy is leading to increasing hiring of former youth-in- care. In Martinez, California the Children and Family Division of Contra

> *The California Youth Connection (CYC), unlike most state youth leadership groups, is an advocacy organization run by current and former foster youth.*

Costa County's Employment and Human Services Agency has hired two emancipated youth at $12 per hour for up to 20 hours per week. The job of these youth is to assist staff with outreach activities and with training (for staff and foster parents). These youth also serve as contacts for other youth in the program and help staff build partnerships with youth in the independent living program (NRCYD, 2003b).

In Akron, Ohio, alumni peer mentors are paid $25 per week, with raises over time. Youth mentors participate in independent living groups with younger children, giving their perspective on what it is like to be on their own. At Valley Youth House in Pennsylvania, three former foster youth have returned as full-time staff. Two are counselors and one is a residential advisor (Voices, Valley Youth House, Summer 2003). Virginia has employed a former foster youth to work with and advise the state independent living coordinator. Texas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma also employ former foster youth in state government. In Wisconsin, former and current foster youth are involved in training (NRCYD, 2003).

In Oklahoma service learning activities are used to promote youth development programming. Oklahoma's Independent Living Specialists use service-learning activities to help youth develop skills and insight. A group of youth from the southwestern corner of the state carried out a project that involved building birdhouses to sell. The proceeds went to help families getting housing through Habitat for Humanity. Sawing and hammering were the physical foundation for the skills of communication and teamwork learned that day. Sometimes the awakening of insight is fostered prior to the activity. When a group of young people planned a trip to a nursing home, they discussed, before the trip, how they differ from and how they are similar to the residents. They noted differences in age and similarity in living in restricted environments (not their own homes) among others. The discussion helped the youth be more aware of the feelings of the nursing home residents and enhanced the experiential qualities of the actual visit (NRCYD, 2003).

Cultural Competence

Public and private child welfare agencies across the country are increasing their attention to the issue of diversity and cultural competence. Culture is "a constantly changing, learned pattern of customs, beliefs, values and behaviors, which are socially acquired and transmitted through symbols, rituals and events, and convey widely shared meanings among its members" (NRCYS, 2000). Factors that impact an individual's culture include but are not limited to: gender, age, sexual orientation, location (urban, rural, and geographic) ethnicity, values, personalities, marital status, and job.

Gaining cultural competence is a long-term process of expanding horizons, thinking critically about the issues of power and oppression, and acting appropriately.

Culturally competent individuals have a mixture of beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills that help them establish trust and communicate with others (National Resource Center for Youth Development, 2003). "Cultural competence occurs when an agency or organization becomes effective in working with individuals of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. This requires basic cultural knowledge and ability to adapt practice skills to fit the needs of clients within their cultural context" (National Resource Center for Youth Services, 2002). Youth-driven programming in independent living services is a vital component of culturally competent practice. Culturally competent practice is different from culturally specific programming. Culturally specific programming targets a particular group of people with the same cultural affiliation. For example, Gavazzi, Alford, and McHenry (1996) report on an African-American rites of passage program which was designed specifically for African-American youth aging out of foster care. Other culturally specific programming may be based on gender, sexual orientation, or other cultural characteristics.

While there is a disproportionately large number of children of color in the child welfare system, professionals of color appear to be under-represented in the fields of social work and psychology (Gilbelman & Schervish, 1993; Lennon, 1993).

While there is a disproportionately large number of children of color in the child welfare system, professionals of color appear to be under-represented in the fields of social work and psychology (Gilbelman & Schervish, 1993; Lennon, 1993). Changing demographics have contributed to the need to recruit and retain workers knowledgeable about providing services to individuals and families from different cultures.

The following percentages were reported for children in care: 34 percent African-American, 13 percent Hispanic, 2 percent American Indian, 1 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 5 percent Unknown/Unable to Determine. This influx of children and youth of color into the child welfare system has contributed to the need to provide services that are more compatible with the cultural needs of these youth and families. Many agencies have embraced this challenge by developing approaches to provide more acceptable and useful services to these populations. Courtney and Barth (1996) challenge agencies to give greater weight to "the fact

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that the adolescent foster care population is not singular. It consists of youths from different backgrounds who have considerably different experiences while in foster care."

Example Programs/Cultural Competence

Green and Leigh (1989) define cultural competence as "the ability of the service provider to give assistance to clients in ways that are acceptable and useful to them." Culturally competent agencies and staff are able to view a young person's strengths and needs within the cultural context and integrate what they know into helping the youth develop a meaningful plan of action. Every agency should strive to meet this definition of competency. This is a skill that must be learned by the individual and the organization. It does not just arise from good intentions. It comes from the commitment to provide services that are culturally appropriate and that make a difference in the lives of individuals and families. It is a skill that requires fostering and reinforcement.

Green Chimneys' New York City program is designed specifically to serve Gay, Lesbian Bisexual Transgender and Questioning (GLBTQ) youth and their families (Green Chimneys, 2001). Green Chimneys Children's Services, Inc. was the first mainstream child welfare agency to develop programming for these youth. Components of the programming focus on residential, educational and social services. The residential component encompasses supervised home environments, apartment living, and homelike environments. The educational component established an alternative school and a resource center for educators and professionals working with GLBTQ youth. The social services component incorporates a broad range of individual group and family services, as well as a mentoring program.

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Rites of Passage, a Chicago Area Project program for African-American male youth, 14 to 21, is based on the value system of the Seven Principles of the Nguzo Saba, which emphasizes qualities such as positive attitude, health, teamwork, caring for other, problem solving, and taking responsibility.(State of Illinois, Chafee Report, 2001). Twelve-week class sessions cycle throughout the year. During the session, participants attend a two-day retreat. Youth completing the program participate in an Afrocentric graduation ceremony (State of Illinois, Chafee Report, 2001). Rites of Passage sessions typically serve 12

to 15 young men; one of the program's goals is to graduate 60 participants each year. Rites of Passage success has led to the creation of a mirror program for young women, Silhouette, based on the same Seven Principles. Silhouette plans to graduate its first class in December, 2003. Rites of Passage and Silhouette are funded by a Youth Empowerment grant from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (S. Foulks, personal interview, November 20, 2003).

Youth in Need, Inc., founded in 1974, in St. Charles, Missouri, has established a transitional living program serving youth ages 16 to 21.

Courtney and Barth's (1996) study reports, "it may be that long-term residents of foster care who maintain ties to their families fare better as adults than those who no longer retain a connection to biological kin."

Their mission statement includes beliefs about cultural competency and the agency hires staff and recruits board members that reflect the culture of the population being served. The program's cultural competency team works to train staff on issues and concerns regarding diversity (Youth In Need, 2001).

Agencies write mission statements and implement personnel practices that address cultural competency and they also pursue cultural competency in their programs and training. For example, Interface Children and Family Services in Camarillo, California

runs such a transitional living program. Their cultural diversity and wholeness committee sponsors cultural events, provides resources and materials on cultural competency, puts on annual retreats, and sponsors training and speakers that address cultural competency. (P. Worthy, personal interview, November 20, 2003).

The Villages of Indiana, a foster care agency in Indianapolis, provides another example. The Villages provide transitional living services, in scattered sites, to youth under 18 and, with the help of private foundation funds, they offer continuing services to help their graduates access Chafee services. The Villages hosts an annual training conference that always includes a track on cultural competence. The Villages staff participate in and fully support: the Black Expo, Hispanic Festival, and other multicultural festivals. The administration adapts staff benefits and holiday schedules to be more culturally responsive (J. Patton, personal interview, November 21, 2003).

Permanent Connections

Assisting youth to successfully develop and sustain life-long emotional relationships with adults is essential to their successful transition to adulthood. Youth formerly in care have reported that after they

have left the system, they seek emotional connection with relatives as well as with other adults they met while in care (Barth, 1990; Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001; Courtney & Barth, 1996; Jones & Moses, 1984; Westat, 1991). These relationships have an enormous impact on a young person's ability to succeed in making the difficult transition from youth to adulthood. In fact, Courtney and Barth's (1996) study reports, "it may be that long-term residents of foster care who maintain ties to their families fare better as adults than those who no longer retain a connection to biological kin."

Programs that focus on youth-defined family connections, by working with the youth and those people with whom the youth has relationships, are more likely to successfully establish relationship permanency. Youth may be the best resource to identify people in their lives or from their pasts that can serve as their permanent connections. The permanency planning process should include relatives, foster parents, group home staff, school personnel and other professionals who can assist case-workers in establishing placement options, as well as defining what barriers there may be to establishing permanent, healthy relationships with adults.

It is important that the adoption option, even for older youth-in-care, not be ignored. A recent report from the National Resource Center for Youth Development indicates that older youth, indeed, desire to be adopted and "have a family" (Kessler and Johnson, 2003). Chafee Program legislation requires that independent living activities "should not be seen as an alternative to permanence for children and can be provided concurrently with adoption and other permanency activities" (National Foster Care Awareness Project, 2003). The You Gotta Believe program in New York has had great success in achieving adoption for older youth. Compelled by statistics that identified 50% of the homeless population in New York as former foster youth, You Gotta Believe began to develop creative ways to encourage older youth adoption (You Gotta Believe, 2003). The primary method for finding adoptive families for youth is through youth-defined relationships and most of the adoptive families have come from the connections youth have already established.

Example Programs/Permanent Connections

Mentoring is an effective way to encourage a positive and permanent connection between a youth and an adult. Research shows that having a mentor decreases the likelihood that disadvantaged youth will engage in violent behavior and drug use, while improving the chances that the youth will attend school regularly and improve academically (USA Freedom Corps, 2003). According to MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership (2003), 2.5 million young people in the United States are involved in mentoring relationships with caring adult volunteers. Unfortunately,

millions more disadvantaged young people have not found mentors. The federal government supports mentoring and through the mentoring initiative, federal agencies will work with nonprofit, community, and faith-based organizations that train volunteer mentors and pair them with children in need. These programs further the goals of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which called for the expansion of services to strengthen families, including creating and expanding mentoring programs for children through networks of community organizations, including religious organizations (US DHHS, 2003).

Many states have already acted to incorporate mentoring into their Independent Living Programs. NRCYD conducted a survey of states to determine the extent of these mentoring programs. Twenty-four state IL Coordinators responded to the survey. Eleven of the states that responded have a mentoring program plan that is documented in their state Chafee plan. Some of these states, as well as states that do not have Chafee-based mentoring plans, also have mentoring programs that are state or county funded (NRCYD, 2003c), such as the program in New York City, where the Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) has pro-

> *The goal is to bring the young people together as a family and create new family holiday traditions.*

vided mentoring services to youth from the Brooklyn Residential Center.

Connecticut has a strong mentoring program. The state IL Coordinator says "the primary goal of our mentoring program is one-on-one, face-to-face mentoring. We do have some continued informal mentoring after a match has been in place for 1 year. Foster parents as well as DCF staff can become mentors for young people who are not placed in their homes or on their caseloads. Some of our programs use group and event mentoring when there are not enough mentors to meet the referral demands. This enables the youth to participate in activities and have some adult interactions that are not professional (NRCYD, 2003c).

Oklahoma has developed creative programming to help youth ages 18 to 21 establish and maintain life-long friendships. For many young people, permanent connections are with their peers who have also spent time in out-of-home care. Young adult retreats provide opportunities for former foster youth to come together to share their experiences after leaving care and to become reacquainted with each other. In Oklahoma, young adult retreats have been two-day events, held in hotels, with opportunities to learn about resources, services, and each other. Many of the participants come with

their spouses and children. Participants enjoy being with people who had similar experiences growing up. They also value the resource information and materials given out at the event more when they are older.

Holidays are times when the lack of permanent connections is most painfully felt. Young adults have said, "It is better to just sleep through Thanksgiving than to spend the day alone." Oklahoma's Independent Living Project Manager reports that they address this need by hosting holiday dinners for the youth 18 to 21 who have no place to go to celebrate. The goal is to bring the young people together as a family and create new family holiday traditions. Young adults are involved in selecting the menu, making sure that the holiday dishes they remember are included. They spend time as a group preparing the turkey, making the pies, and decorating the table. On the day of the event, many young adults come with friends, foster parents and/or biological family members. Everyone goes home with leftovers and fond memories of a holiday spent with "family".

> *When young people move out on their own, they need to be well connected with community resources and individuals.*

Collaboration

Preparing a young person to take a place in the community as an adult is the community's responsibility. Independent living and transitional living programs should be active in seeking community involvement and collaboration. Collaboration is defined as "the process by which several agencies or organizations make a formal, sustained commitment to work together to accomplish a common mission" (NRCYD, 2003).

When programs reach out to community organizations and individuals, they create links that will benefit youth while they are in the programs and after they leave. Community involvement can bring additional financial resources, in-kind contributions, and other types of support. Community members can help youth who are looking for housing, seeking employment, and finding ways to fill their free time. Collaborations with community organizations can lead to job shadowing experiences, mentoring opportunities and long-term personal connections.

When young people move out on their own, they need to be well connected with community resources and individuals. Programs that promote community interaction and interagency collaboration are modeling, for the youth, the importance of networking and community support systems. Therefore, collaboration is offered as a core principle, which must be part of effective independent and transitional living programs. Administrators and staff in these

agencies should embrace the value of inter-agency and community collaboration and establish links that will help youth as they prepare to leave and after they leave care.

Example Programs/Collaboration

According to Chafee Program require-ments, states must consult with public and private organizations in implementing their services. This should include coordinating new independent living program activity with other federal and state programs for young people. Toward this end, states are working on improving their community and system connections on behalf of youth leaving care.

The collaboration described next, between Fellowship of Lights and AmeriCorps, has been discontinued because of the current loss of funding for AmeriCorps. But, it serves as a useful example of effective provi-sion of needed services for 18- to 21-year-olds.

Fellowship of Lights in Baltimore, Md., used AmeriCorps volunteer members to help youth in aftercare connect with the community. AmeriCorps members paired a counselor and a youth to plan and prioritize aftercare activities. The focus of the activities was on establishing community connections. The effort involved use of the Youth Asset-Based Inventory to mutually identify areas of need and interest. Based on the results of the inventory, the youth and the AmeriCorps member decided on activities and services. The youth and the AmeriCorps member then visited the sites and evaluated their

value for use as aftercare links. The approach not only developed mentors for aftercare community connections, but was also a resource for agencies with limited case-man-agement staff who wanted to support the community needs of youth leaving care. An added positive aspect was that many of the AmeriCorps volunteers are college-age and, thus, close in age to the youth leaving care. Many of the volunteers had recently experi-enced leaving home, and although they may not have been in foster care, they had some appreciation for the challenges of the transi-tion (MANYCorps, 2003).

Oklahoma has what is perhaps one of the most comprehensive state collaborative efforts for aftercare. "Yes I Can," Oklahoma's Youth-In-Care Alumni Network is a partnership of agencies working together to assist youth to live as successful, well-adjusted, active members of the com-munity. Participating agencies include the Department of Human Service's Division of Children and Family Services/ Independent Living Program; Youth Services of Tulsa, Youth Services for Oklahoma County , Challenges of Adult Living (COAL) and the National Resource Center for Youth Services. These agencies have come together to create a comprehensive range of services for youth who leave DHS or tribal custody at age 18. By contacting a statewide 800 number, youth may request short-term assistance with rent or utility deposits, bills, furniture, food expenses, help with medical and dental needs, family planning, counsel-

ing or substance abuse treatment, public transportation assistance, car repair, driver's education and license fees, educational assistance with test courses and fees, tuition, and books. (NRCYD, 2003).

A unique example of a state/university collaboration, that is beginning to have a positive impact on older youth, is the Children and Family Research Center (CFRC) at the School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The CFRC, which is funded in-part by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, also receives federal and private grants to conduct research in the area of child welfare services. Recently, CFRC received a Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiatives grant to pilot the innovative Young Researchers Program. This program provides young people with valuable work experience and insight into social science research. In addition, the program will provide useful information about older youth in foster care.

To staff the Young Researchers Program, CFRC recruited ten young research assistants, ages 15 to 21, through the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Statewide Youth Advisory Board. These youth conduct phone surveys with 200 youth in state custody who are transitioning to adulthood. The Youth Engagement Survey was developed by young people facing transitioning issues and includes questions on money management, employment, education, health, housing,

and personal and community engagement (CFRC, 2003).

Conclusion

The age of majority in America has been arbitrarily set at 18 years. However, researchers, educators, financial counselors and others are realizing that the group of youth aged 18 to 21 are not self-sufficient at this legal age of majority. In fact, relatively few Americans under the age of 25 have completed schooling, become economically independent, acquired a residence, and formed a family (Rindfuss, 1991). Yet, until recently, youth raised in foster care and who had not been adopted have been expected to "live independently" after reaching their 18th birthdays.

Unfortunately, many youth raised in foster care experience disadvantages when it comes to preparing for adulthood. The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 tries to mitigate some of these problems by creating resources for services for this age group, up to age 21.

Services and programs that are effective in serving this population embody the four core principles of youth development, cultural competence, collaboration, and permanence connections. Some of the effective services and programs highlighted in this monograph have been mentoring programs, youth advisory boards, financial supports, culturally competent programming , and hiring former foster youth for employment. When states and agencies strive to incorporate the four core principles into their ser-

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