



Association for Children
of New Jersey

When Adulthood Must Come Early

The Plight of Youth Aging Out of Foster Care and New Jersey's Efforts to Help Them

This report was made possible by grants from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Delisi Family Foundation. It was written by ACNJ Communications Director Maia Davis with assistance from ACNJ Executive Director Cecilia Zalkind, Assistant Director Mary Coogan, and Data Policy Analyst Cecilia Traini.

Introduction

Every year, 7,000 New Jersey children who have suffered abuse or neglect are removed from home. Most eventually are returned home, taken in by relatives or friends as guardians, or are adopted. Some don't leave foster care. This report is about them — the nearly 500 youth who leave care each year because services end. They “age out.”

This report is also about the 2,800 teens now in out-of-home care, which includes those living in group homes, residential centers and shelters as well as with foster families. By virtue of their age, they are less likely than young children to be adopted or taken in by a guardian. Most will either be returned to families or age out. They are moving inexorably toward adulthood, often without a stable family to help.

Youth today need more help than ever. Legal adulthood still comes at 18. But maturity arrives later, as has been recognized by New Jersey courts through the extension of child support payments past 18. The dearth of good jobs for those without college, delays in marriage and childbearing, and the high cost of striking out on one's own all contribute

“Everybody feels so bad for the little kids [in foster care]. But once you hit a certain age, it's a wrap. Everybody assumes you're ready to go out on your own. It's not that easy,” —Jessica, 20.

to today's young people typically not achieving independence until their mid-20s. Foster youth don't get this luxury. They are often thrust into independence too young with too little support.

That is why they are so vulnerable. Studies show three out of ten homeless adults in the nation report having been in foster care. Twenty-five percent of former foster youth report being homeless at least one night 2½ to 4 years after

leaving care. Former foster youth are also more likely than their peers to have dropped out of school, to have mental health problems and to earn too little to break out of poverty.¹

Foster youth are by no means doomed to fail. Many emerge from foster care with uncommon resilience. Their potential must be tapped.

New Jersey has taken advantage of federal funding to improve services to older foster youth, including extending the foster care age limit from 18 to the 21st birthday, expanding subsidized housing and launching a scholarship program. But, as discussed in this report, the state is faced with a decline in federal funds for aging out youth. This increases the challenge of making sure that services reach all youth who need help.

In a recent report, the court-appointed monitor of the 2006 modified settlement of a lawsuit against New Jersey's child welfare system noted that the Department of Children and Families has directed resources to older youth:

However, this is a population that has long been neglected by system efforts. The Department has amended policies and procedures, but will need to move beyond plans to action to ensure real change for youth.²

This policy brief is the first of a series that the Association for Children of New Jersey will produce on aging out youth. In this, we outline some challenges facing the state as it tries to meet the needs of this population.

Summary and Recommendations

New Jersey's promising new approach

The state has in the past few years taken exciting steps to help foster youth move successfully into adulthood. They include:

- Extending the age limit for leaving foster care from 18 to 21;
- Awarding millions of federal dollars in scholarships to foster youth;
- Opening critically needed housing for youth who are aging out;
- Putting new emphasis on helping teens establish lifelong stable relationships, through adoption, Kinship Legal Guardianship or connections to a caring adult; and
- Re-establishing specialized adolescent units in child welfare offices.

Challenges remain

The state faces a number of challenges, detailed on the following pages. They include:

- More than 2,800 teens in out-of-home care, many of whom will age out;
- The risk that the popular Foster Care Scholars program will run short of funds to meet the need;
- A dearth of housing for former foster youth with mental health or behavioral problems;
- The difficulty in bringing all caseworkers and service providers on board with the new policies and services for older youth;
- Fragmented communication to caseworkers, service providers and youth themselves about the policies and services for older youth; and
- A historic lack of coordination between state agencies in serving aging out youth.

Recommendations

One of the greatest challenges facing the state is funding. The state has paid for aging out programs largely through federal dollars from the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, established through a 1999 law known as the Chafee Act, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Chafee allocations are based on a state's total number of children in out-of-home, or foster, care. Although the number of older youth in foster care in New Jersey has

dropped only slightly over six years, the number of younger children, 12 and under, has fallen substantially and therefore so has the total number of youth in care. As a result, the state expects a \$300,000 cut in Chafee funds to \$2.8 million in FY 2009.

New Jersey needs to make up for this loss by stretching federal dollars and by exploring where any further expenditures of state funds might be necessary. Programs for aging out youth are a smart investment. Dollars spent now save more dollars later through reduced costs of homelessness, mental hospital commitments, incarceration and poverty. Dollars invested now help foster youth to become productive citizens who contribute to the future of this state.

For the governor and legislature:

1. Approve the governor's proposed \$15 million increase in the State Rental Assistance Program. Use that increase toward building more supportive housing for aging out youth that is:
 - "permanent," with no deadline for when tenants must leave. Life Link Homes at Robin's Nest in Gloucester County is a model.
 - geared to young people with behavioral or mental health problems.
2. Ensure that aging out youth with mental health or behavioral problems get the same access to supportive housing as adults coming out of mental hospitals. A 1997 directive by the state's human services commissioner ordered such equal access.
3. Explore ways to shore up the Foster Care Scholars program, such as by appropriating money for a 2001 tuition-waiver law that was passed but not funded.
4. Make certain that state agencies continue to work toward better coordination in serving aging out youth.

For the Department of Children and Families:

1. Gather and publish crucial data on aging out youth in New Jersey. To ensure that service dollars are channeled as effectively as possible, the state needs to more precisely gauge what these young people need before age 21 and how they fare after they age out.
2. Continue to improve coordination within DCF, between DYFS and the Division of Child Behavioral Health Services, and between DCF and other state offices in serving aging out youth.
3. Improve communication on services for aging out youth by helping the *Transitions for Youth* web site reach its potential.

CHALLENGES

I. Teens and Young Adults Represent Growing Share of Children in Foster Care.

The state’s attention to aging out youth is occurring at a time of high need. While the overall number of New Jersey children in out-of-home care has fallen sharply since 2002, most of the drop has been for children 12 and under: Their numbers have fallen by 21 percent.

The number of teens in care has meanwhile declined by a smaller 13 percent. As a result, youth 13 to 17 years old represent a slightly growing proportion of children in care, making up 30 percent of the population of foster children now compared to 29.1 percent six years ago.

Young adults make up the fastest growing share of youth in care, with the biggest jump occurring in 2007, reflective of the state’s new policies toward youth over 18. Altogether, the number of teens and young adults in care is 3,378: They make up more than a third, 35.7 percent, of all youth in care, compared to 31.1 percent in 2002.

This presents a challenge to the state. Federal funds to serve aging out youth are based on the total number of children of all ages in out-of-home care. With the number of younger children dropping more sharply than the number of teens and the number of young adults climbing, New Jersey faces a loss in federal dollars to serve a high number of aging out youth.

Older Youth Make Up Growing Share of Children in Out-of-Home Care							
Numbers of Children in Out-of Home Care, by Age							
As of 12/31:	12 and under		13 to 17		18 to 21		Total
	number	% of total	number	% of total	number	% of total	
2002	7,730	69.0	3,258	29.1	221	2.0	11,209
2003	8,721	68.4	3,764	29.5	263	2.1	12,748
2004	8,121	66.4	3,831	31.3	276	2.3	12,228
2005	7,377	66.0	3,512	31.4	293	2.6	11,182
2006	6,913	66.8	3,121	30.2	317	3.1	10,351
*2007	6,088	64.3	2,836	30.0	542	5.7	9,466
% change 2002–2007	-21.2	-6.8	-13.0	3.1	145.2	185	-15.6

**2007 data is preliminary.*

II. Nearly one in five teens who spend time in foster care age out.

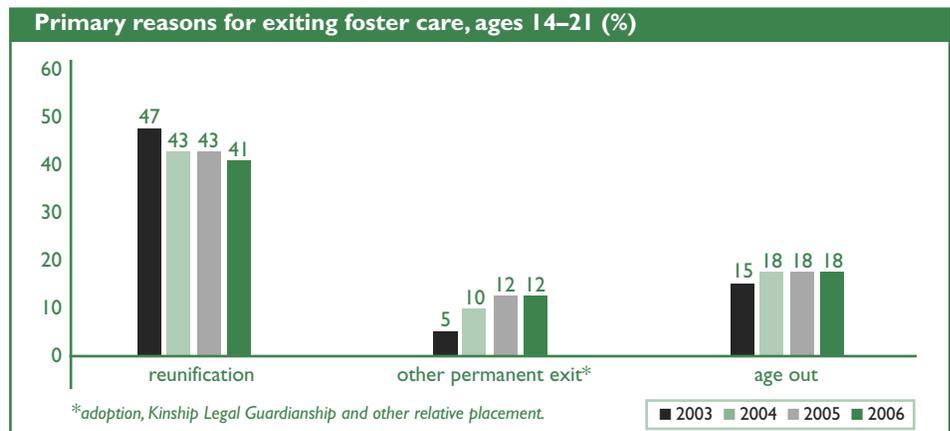
New Jersey aims for children removed from their homes for abuse or neglect to leave foster care either through reunification with their families, adoption or Kinship Legal Guardianship. The state has a long way to go to achieve this for teens and young adults.

Family reunification has dropped among teens and young adults, DCF data shows. In 2003, nearly half — 47 percent — of 14- to 21-year-olds left DYFS care to return to their families. That fell six points in 2006, a 13 percent decline. DCF cautions that the reunification numbers for all these years may not include some youth who were reunited with their families by DYFS but whose reasons for exit were incorrectly categorized.

The decline in family reunification was offset by a rise in other permanent exits—adoption, Kinship Legal Guardianship and placement with a relative. The increase has been especially pronounced in Kinship Legal Guardianship (KLG), a relatively new initiative in which youth are put under the guardianship of close family friends or relatives. Adoptions of older youth also rose significantly between 2003 and 2006.

But adoptions still represented just 2.9 percent of all exits for this age group in 2006.

The proportion of teens aging out of foster care has, meanwhile, remained static at 18 percent for three years, close to one in five. To bring that number down, New Jersey must work on many fronts. It needs to provide preventive services to troubled families before children suffer abuse or neglect. When children are removed from home, services to their families should continue to increase the likelihood of a safe reunification. When reunification is not possible, DCF must push to find new, permanent homes for them through adoption or, when that is either not possible or not appropriate, Kinship Legal Guardianship.



DCF is taking steps on many of these fronts, including a new effort to increase adoptions of older youth and the creation of the Division of Prevention and Community Partnerships. But even as it works toward reducing the number of youth who will age out of foster care, DCF must serve those already in that disturbing predicament — on the verge of adulthood without a home.

Primary reasons for exiting foster care, by numbers of youth ages 14–21						
	total exiters ages 14–21	reunification	adoption	Kinship Legal Guardianship	other relative placement	aged out
2003	2,455	1,156	38	29	50	359
2004	2,712	1,178	59	72	132	499
2005	2,630	1,130	80	163	69	473
2006	2,675	1,092	77	175	56	475
% change 2003–06	9%	-6%	103%	503%	12%	32%

III. New Jersey needs more housing for aging out youth with behavioral or mental health problems.

DCF in partnership with the state Housing Mortgage and Finance Agency and other state offices has in the past two years added more than a hundred beds in transitional living programs for aging out youth, bringing the total to 260. This total does not include housing available in shelters such as Covenant House. The department deserves credit for this important initiative.

Still, there is a dire need for housing for youth with mental health or behavioral problems. Young people between 18 and 21 who are being released from psychiatric hospitals or whose diagnoses require structure and supervision but not hospitalization have few places to go. Some private agencies that contract with DCF say they find themselves taking in young people who are more severely troubled and require greater supervision than their typical clients. For their part, DYFS staff say it is difficult to find programs to accept such youth. If a young person has, for example, a record of destructive behavior, agencies not equipped to provide intensive supervision may be reluctant to take a chance.

The size of the need is evident from the numbers of teens and young adults in out-of-home placement through the Division of Child Behavioral Health Services, shown in the pie chart on this page.

Approximately half of these 2,000 youth are also under DYFS supervision, according to DCF officials. Sixty-two percent, about 1,400, are age 14 to 17. Assuming half of them are also under DYFS, that is several hundred teens with a history of behavioral or mental health problems who, if they don't reunite with families or get adopted, will age out and need a place to live.

There should be a seamless transfer for youth from child behavioral health to the state Division of Mental Health Services for adults. But there is a dearth of supportive-housing for mentally ill adults. About half the adults in state mental hospitals, 1,000 people, are lingering even though commitment orders have been lifted because there is nowhere for them to go. An advocacy group has sued

to end this grim situation, which has put pressure on New Jersey to give hospital patients priority placement in supportive housing. This leaves aging out youth in the cold — sometimes literally.

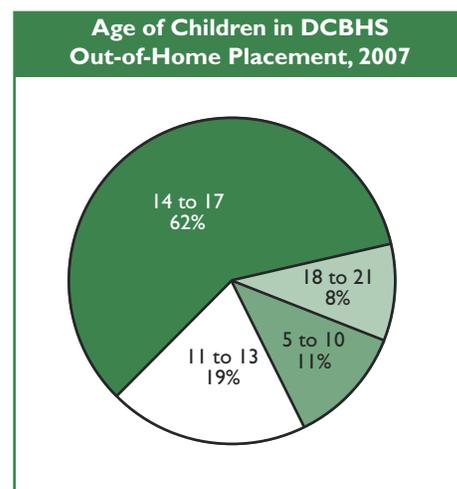
When severely troubled youth leave foster care with no place to live, they can end up on the streets, in jail or in emergency rooms. They can end up in crises that may, ironically, land them in adult mental hospitals, where they might finally get on a list for housing.

Competition for placement in the scarce housing that exists for mentally ill adults has been a longstanding issue. In a 1997 administrative order (no. 2:07), then-Commissioner of Human Services William Waldman said seriously emotionally disturbed youth coming out of hospitals or residential centers should get “the same priority status” for services as adults in an institution. It is unclear why this order has seemed to fall by the wayside.

But the problem is again drawing attention. The Division of Mental Health and DCF are drafting a memorandum of understanding under which DCF would identify youth at age 17½ who are aging out and will need mental health services as adults. The mental health division would then be responsible for providing services.

The other problem remains: Without enough supportive housing appropriate for these youth, where are they to live? Queried on this, DCF officials said they plan to review whether some housing programs for aging out youth can be adapted to take in those with behavioral or mental health problems. We

Housing for Aging Out Youth	
County	Number of Beds
Bergen	11
Burlington	12
Camden	25
Cape May	4
Essex	55
Gloucester	30
Hudson	18
Mercer	17
Middlesex	11
Monmouth	24
Ocean	7
Passaic	24
Somerset	10
Union	12
Total	260



urge the department to undertake this review and make appropriate changes soon.

The legislature also needs to help. ACNJ is strongly recommending the approval of the governor's proposed \$15 million increase in the State Rental Assistance Program (SRAP). A por-

tion of funding in this program, 17 percent, is allocated to special projects, including for aging out youth. The state should use increased SRAP funding toward building more housing for this particularly vulnerable population—severely troubled youth who are aging out of foster care.

IV.

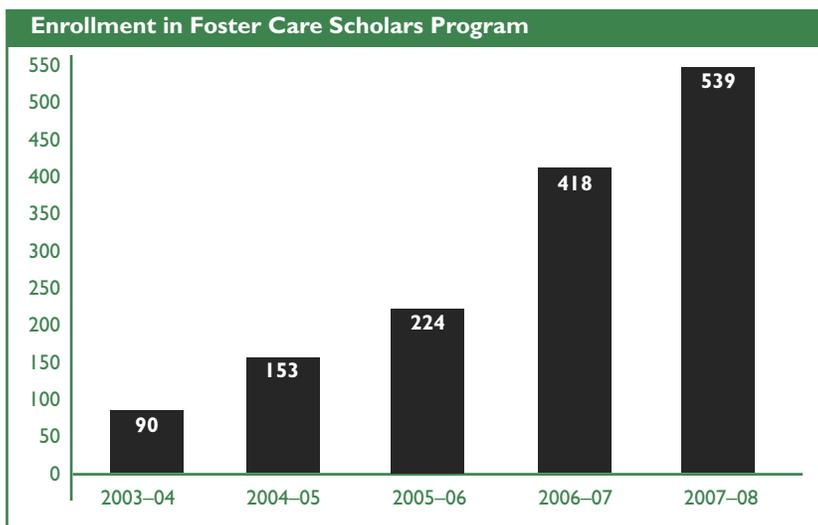
The Foster Care Scholars program, one of the most important initiatives benefiting aging out youth, is in danger of running short of money.

The state's scholarship program for current and former foster youth is one of the most popular initiatives for this population. The number receiving scholarships or stipends for living expenses while in school has risen from 90 in the program's first year to 539 this spring. That is a nearly six-fold increase in five years.

This is a credit to DCF and to the nonprofit group that spearheaded the scholarship initiative and runs it in partnership with the state, Foster and Adoptive Family Services (formerly called the Foster Parents Association). The program offers scholarships — primarily for college but also for vocational training, stipends to cover living costs, and guidance services. It offers foster youth the opportunity for higher education that is practically essential in today's competitive economy. It also produces another benefit that is just as important, although less tangible: hope.

It is remarkable to hear older teens in foster care speak with confidence about their plans for college and career. One high school junior in northern New Jersey has picked the state college he wants to attend and what he plans to study: pre-law. Another young man in the southern part of the state got an early start: He began community college at 16.

The Foster Care Scholars program gives young people who have had a rough, traumatic start in life a reason to work hard in school and stay out of trouble. It fuels their aspirations. But the fast growth in enrollment threatens to outstrip the available resources, particularly with the looming cut in Chafee funds to New Jersey. ACNJ plans to explore this issue in further detail in a future policy brief. In the meantime, the state should work with DCF to explore ways to shore up this vital program, including through possibly appropriating money for a 2001 law granting foster youth tuition waivers to state colleges. The state has spent none of its own money, only federal funds, to implement this law.



V.

New Jersey's critical supports for aging out youth don't appear to reach all who need them.

College scholarships. Housing. Counseling and financial supports to help youth make the transition to independent living. These programs are essential to give young people aging out of foster care the chance to become successful adults. But it is unclear if these services are reaching all who need them.

DCF has begun gathering some data on this. A survey in fall 2007 found 316 youth participating in programs ranging from life skills training to transitional housing. Some of these youth were also among the 463 young people receiving college and vocational school scholarships in the fall. But the Foster Care Scholars program is not exclusive to those aging out of foster care. It is also open to former foster youth who have reunited with their families or who have been adopted and

to homeless youth who were never in foster care. It seems safe to conclude, therefore, that, at most, close to 800 aging out youth were benefiting from some state program.

That suggests several hundred were not participating in any program to prepare them for adulthood. With nearly 500 aging out *every year*, there are at any given time approximately 1,400 to 1,500 former foster youth between their 18th and 21st birthdays who may be eligible for services. This raises the question: Why aren't more taking advantage of programs to help them?

This also brings up the question of why more youth aren't staying in care until their 21st birthday. The number of 18- to 21-year-olds in foster care has risen substantially, from 221 in 2002 to 542 at the end of 2007, a 145 percent increase.

But the still small number of young adults in care suggests that many cases continue to be closed when youth are 18 or 19.

“DYFS workers need to be more informed. They don’t understand, if they shut the case they close the door.”— Ashley, 19.

Consider that DCF data on youth in foster care at the end of 2007 shows numbers increasing with age; there were 404 youth age 13 compared to 725 age 17. But after the 18th birthday there is a drop off to 542 for three years of age, 18 through 20.

Age Breakdown of Older Youth in Out-of-Home Care, 12/31/2007

Age	Number
13 to under 14	404
14 to under 15	504
15 to under 16	577
16 to under 17	626
17 to under 18	725
18 and over	542
Total	3,378

(DCF provided ACNJ an age breakdown of youth in care for every year of age except those 18 years old through 20.) If these 542 youth are divided evenly between the three years in that age group, that comes to 180. The number in care drops from 725 at age 17 to an average of 180 for ages 18, 19, and 20. What happens to the rest? This data suggests that up to 75 percent of youth — three out of four — who could remain in care until their 21st birthdays don’t.

Youth whose cases have been closed are still eligible for aftercare services that include counseling and financial assistance, such as for securing an apartment or obtaining driving lessons to enable the youth to drive to work or school. But housing options are more limited for youth without open DYFS cases. In addition, youths whose cases have been closed before they turn 21 have no DYFS caseworker to help guide them in their transition to adulthood.

DCF’s new policy, instituted in early 2007, calls for all cases to be kept open unless the young person requests in writing that it be closed, or if the youth is “noncompliant,” such as by failing to take a life skills course, participate in a transitional living (housing) program, or look for a job. But one teen told ACNJ that his caseworker told him on his 18th birthday he had

to write a letter requesting that his case stay open. Another reported that caseworkers seem uninformed about what services are available to older youth.

The problem may spring in part from a tension between the department’s various goals. On one hand, DCF is putting resources and energy into serving youth past their 18th birth-

day. On the other, it aims to reduce the overall number of young people in foster care to keep the caseload at a manageable size.

It’s understandable if some caseworkers get confused: If their primary role is to

protect children from abuse and neglect, why should they keep cases open when the youth become legal adults at 18? The question may be more difficult if the young person is belligerent, hostile or overly demanding. Remember, these are teens.

Some caseworkers are not well-suited to working with teens and young adults. ACNJ has heard anecdotal reports of youths having cases closed for noncompliance when the young people neglected to return their caseworkers’ calls. What if the young person and caseworker didn’t get along or the youth felt frustrated by a perceived lack of effort by the caseworker?

DCF officials acknowledge that its new policies on older youth have been slow to filter from Trenton to all workers in local DYFS offices across the state. The department expects adherence to improve as specialized adolescent units are gradually re-established in each office. In addition, a new training program for DYFS workers and service providers that emphasizes working cooperatively with adolescents and their families should help significantly.

The department should also consider clarifying its guidelines on when cases of older youth may be closed for noncompliance. Young people should be fully informed of these rules.

Youth 18 to 21 in Out-of-Home Care

Year	Number	Percent of Total
2002	221	2
2003	263	2
2004	276	2
2005	293	3
2006	317	3
2007	542	6

VI.

New Jersey aims for aging out youth to become both capable of independence and connected to supportive adults. The state is not there yet.

DYFS caseworkers might be less likely to close cases of youth between 18 and 21 if there were more clarity about what they are supposed to do for these young adults. Placing them in a transitional living program, hooking them up to a life skills course, securing scholarships — all these and the other services offered are important. But they aren’t enough. DCF policy rightly recognizes that aging out youth need lifelong relationships with caring adults or, in child welfare parlance, “permanency.”

Ideally, those permanent connections come through reunification with family or adoption. But adoptions of 18- to 21-year-olds are rare. There were two in 2006. Reunification happens more often, even among youth who stay in foster care until they age out. Many teens and young adults in care have strong connections to their families, as found in the Rutgers survey of youth receiving services in fall 2007. Once they leave the state’s care, they can decide on their own whether to live with some family member.

But what of those who lack such family relationships? DYFS in mid-2007 launched a pilot project under which three service providers are combing through the records of a few dozen youth to uncover relatives or other adults who might

want to serve as a home base, mentor or even just a cheerleader as that young person moves into adulthood. The hope is that successes through this project will provide a guide for others working with older youth.

In fact, efforts to establish permanent connections should be ongoing from the time a youth enters foster care. In those cases where it becomes clear that reunification with family is

unlikely and adoption is not on the horizon, the focus should turn to finding finding connections outside the immediate family. That work should not stop when the young person turns 18. DYFS needs to make sure that caseworkers and service providers for young adults recognize that helping youth establish supportive relationships with caring adults is part of the job.

VII.

Child welfare caseworkers, service providers, advocates for aging out youth, and teens themselves need comprehensive, up-to-date information on policies and programs.

The Adolescent Practice and Permanency Unit of DCF publishes a services guide that is regularly updated and fairly complete. But printed guides such as this are by their nature limited in depth. The handbook doesn't include, for instance, information on the eligibility requirements of different transitional living programs, such as whether they accept youth with a history of behavior problems. It also cannot give real-time information on program openings.

DCF officials say much of this information is now on an internal web site available to caseworkers and service providers. But that site also doesn't track vacancies, which means workers may still have to call programs around the state to find what is available in any given case. In addition, information on programs needs to be on a web site available to other groups that work closely with foster youth, including the Child Placement Advisory Council, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), and law guardians representing youth in court. DCF should also consider making such information available to youth themselves, as a way of furthering the department's stated goal of empowering young people in foster care to make decisions about their lives.

New Jersey has a start on such a broad-based web site in www.transitionsforyouth.org, operated for DCF by the Rutgers University School of Social Work. This attractive site gives an overview of the different programs available to aging out youth and provides some important links, such as to emergency shelters and food banks. It also has posted updates on the eligibility requirements and vacancies in housing programs. But as of March 2008, the latest vacancy update was three months prior. The most recent information on internship and scholarship opportunities was from 10 months earlier.

DCF staff say Rutgers depends on them to provide updated information. The department should work to bring this site up to its full potential, making it the go-to place for information on aging out youth in New Jersey. It should also explore including articles written by older youth for their peers. Examples of this can be found on a new web site for aging out youth in New York City, www.youthcomm.org/pyayyouth.

VIII.

Aging out youth can be hurt by poor coordination between state offices.

When young people with behavioral or mental health problems age out of foster care, they can fall through the cracks between DCF and the Division of Mental Health Services, as discussed earlier in the section on housing. That problem is being addressed through a memo of understanding between the departments.

Poor coordination within DCF, between DYFS and the child behavioral health division, can also pose risks for older youth in foster care. For instance, some service providers report difficulties and delays in getting mental health treatment for foster youth who are not under dual supervision with the behavioral health unit. Others report that some youth in residential care under the behavioral health unit suffer from the same lack of family connection as DYFS-supervised youth. But because these young people are not under DYFS, they aren't entitled to scholarships, aftercare programs or other supports for aging out youth.

Youth under the supervision of DCF need to benefit from the department's full range of services rather than be hurt by a lack of coordination among its divisions. Those in residential care under the behavioral health unit who turn out to be victims of abuse or neglect should have a case opened under DYFS. Likewise, all foster children in DYFS residential care should be able to easily access mental health treatment.

Older youth are the most likely to be hurt by lack of coordination or communication between these two divisions. Teens are more likely than young children to need mental health treatment. Half of children in residential care under behavioral health—most of whom are teens—are dually supervised by DYFS.

DCF has in place plans to improve coordination within its department, including placing social workers with mental health expertise in DYFS offices. The department has also shown what can be achieved when state offices work cooperatively, such as through the partnerships that have covered the funding and operating costs of new housing for aging out youth.

“How many foster youth in New Jersey have babies before age 21? How many spend time in a homeless shelter, in jail or unemployed? No one knows.”

IX.

How successful is New Jersey in helping youth who age out of foster care? The state needs to find out.

How many former foster youth in New Jersey have babies before age 21? How many spend time in a homeless shelter, in jail or unemployed? How many get good jobs, their own apartments and have a support network of family or friends? No one knows.

New Jersey lacks data on how youth do after leaving foster care. DCF has contracted with Rutgers School of Social Work to begin collecting such data. It needs to move ahead on this quickly. Tracking how youth are doing after foster care is necessary to ensure the state is spending dollars effectively.

Part of the problem lies with the federal government. The 1999 Chafee Act required states to track outcomes of former foster youth. But the federal Department of Health and Human Services delayed setting rules on what information to collect until late February of this year.

New Jersey has made a good start on collecting data on older youth still in foster care or receiving services. But there is no data available on, for example, how many graduate high school, receive a G.E.D. or drop out. We also don't know how many have substance abuse problems, become pregnant while in care or have a history of involvement with the criminal justice system. DCF officials say they expect the department's new computer system, installed in 2007, to allow them to collect such data on older youth. With older youth comprising more than a third of the out-of-home caseload, it is important that this be a priority.

Notes

- ¹ Cook, R. (1991) *A national evaluation of Title IV-E foster care independent living programs for youth*. Rockville, MD: Westat Inc., as cited on web site of Child Welfare League of America. Courtney, M. E. (2005). *Youth Aging Out of Foster Care*. Philadelphia: Network on Transitions to Adulthood. Policy Brief Issue 19.
- ² *Charlie and Nadine H. et al v. Corzine*, Monitoring Report for January 1 through June 30, 2007.
- ³ Courtney, M. E., Dworsky A., & Pollack H. (2007). *When should the state cease parenting? Evidence from the Midwest Study*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at The University of Chicago.

Sources for charts

Older Youth Make Up Growing Share of Children in Out-of-Home Care: Data provided by DCF.

Primary Reasons for Exiting Foster Care: exit data provided by DCF.

Housing for Aging Out Youth: data provided by DCF.

Age of Children in DCBHS Out-of-Home Placement: DCF web site data, as of Dec. 2007.

Enrollment in Foster Care Scholars program: data provided by DCF and Foster and Adoptive Family Services.

Youth 18 to 21 in Out-of-Home Care: DCF data.

Age Breakdown of Older Youth in Out-of-Home Care: DCF data.

Conclusion

Youth aging out of foster care have already had it rough. They suffered abuse or neglect as children. They were removed from their families. In foster care, some have had multiple moves to different homes or residential facilities and different schools, exacerbating their trauma. Now they find themselves nearing a point when the state child welfare system, which has taken on the role of parent, will withdraw from their lives. Services will stop.

Research in other states has found that extending foster care and services past 18 significantly improves the chances for aging out youth to succeed as adults.³ New Jersey has wisely taken advantage of federal funds to lengthen the time youth may stay in foster care and to offer critical supports even after cases are closed. Some service providers who work with older youth say they have noticed a big change over the past two years in what is available to those 18 and over. The challenge now is to ensure that all of DCF's goals and policies for older youth are realized.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the many people who provided information and insights for this policy brief. Special thanks to Nancy Caplan, Independent Living Coordinator for DYFS, and Valerie Ayres, DYFS Assistant Director for Adolescent Practice and Permanency. Their accessibility and forthrightness is appreciated.

Valuable help also came from others in DCF:

Molly Armstrong
Samantha Jo Broderick
Eileen Crummy
Christine Mozes
Erin O'Leary
Joanne Patalano
Nadezhda Robinson
Bob Sabreen
Andrea Van Dyke
Patricia Warren

And young people on the Youth Advisory Boards of Bergen, Gloucester and Monmouth counties. Their honesty and optimism were inspiring. The shape this brief ultimately took prevented the inclusion of many quotes. But much of the information presented reflects the voices and experiences of these young people.

Other state offices:

Debbie Heinz, State Rental Assistance Program
Patty Holland, Division of Mental Health Services
Pam McCrory, Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency

Dedicated staff at these organizations:

Foster and Adoptive Family Services Family Service, Burlington County
Children's Aid and Family Services Monmouth County Care Management Organization
Robin's Nest New Jersey Alliance for Children, Youth and Families
Beacon House Court Appointed Special Advocates of New Jersey

The Association for Children of New Jersey

35 Halsey Street, Newark, NJ 07102
(973) 643-3876 ■ Fax (973) 643-9153

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