

Journey To Success Kentucky

Policy Solutions to Improve Outcomes for Current and Former Foster Youth

*In 2020, 688 youth transitioned out of the foster care system.**

When we support transition age foster youth – young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are transitioning out of the foster care system– they can develop into healthier, thriving adults who can be more engaged in our communities.

Youth who have spent time in foster care face a particularly steep climb on the road to adulthood due to adverse experiences during their early years. Despite important federal reforms in child welfare, many young people continue to face significant barriers to opportunities to succeed in school, work, and community life.

A signature federal policy is the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood, enacted in 1999. It is the only federal program dedicated to supporting transition-age young people. Chafee provides flexible funding to support young people in their transition to adulthood, which can be used for a wide range of services like education and room and board. The program carries the right vision but lacks strong execution and impact. For example, only about one-third of young people leaving foster care at age 18 receive any type of Chafee programming.^

We can and should do better by these young people. But getting there will require greater program capacity, federal funding, and a stronger approach to services.

“ Young Adult Spotlight: Ely

Ely, a former foster youth, shares that the example of her deceased sister highlights the importance of ongoing support for youth transitioning out of care. She says that despite her sister seeking help on countless occasions after aging out, no positive results came of this. Ely reports that her sister faced domestic violence, homelessness, poverty, substance use, and extreme mental health issues alone and with a child at the age of 19.

Ely believes that if her sister had been offered more effective resources to combat or even ease these struggles, she would still be alive today. ”

Young Adult Spotlight: Cynthia

Cynthia, a former foster youth, says that she believed her state workers were convinced she would do well once she turned 21 and they blamed her for not being prepared instead of offering her resources, just days before the transition was to occur. ”

“It felt more like they were excited to get rid of me rather than them celebrating what could have been a successful transition. Instead, I became homeless, and it was only my mentor from Orphan Care Alliance who saved me,” said Cynthia.

“ It was Cynthia’s connection to True Up, a KY-based organizations that prepares foster youth through education and experience-based learning, that introduced her to community resources available to her.

Solutions to improve outcomes for current and former foster youth:

Solution #1

Make targeted, ongoing support available to youth and young adults up to age 26 to help them complete their education and workforce training, obtain safe and stable housing, heal from trauma, achieve lifelong family permanence, become economically secure, and have a strong foundation on which to build their future.

When foster youth turn 21, access to previous supports decreases or ends. This disconnects them from resources such as stable housing, educational vouchers, and supportive relationships—which are critical to their basic needs and ability to thrive. Specifically, we can:

- ensure youth have access to high quality health care and mental health treatment during the transition to adulthood by ensuring automatic enrollment into Medicaid for youth formerly in foster care
- make targeted and ongoing financial and case management assistance available to former foster youth
- support additional transitional housing options specific to former foster youth

Solution #2

Ensure that each young person is well-supported in their transition from adolescence to adulthood and that agencies are appropriately resourced to provide this support.

It is important to wrap all available resources around each individual transitioning out of foster care. Specifically, we can:

- connect youth to supportive, caring adults who provide them with a sense of belonging through structured mentorship programs
- ensure agencies have funding and capacity to do meaningful transition planning and life skill development early and often with older foster youth
- support organizations specifically dedicated to connecting transition-age youth to available resources

Solution #3

Ensure young people with lived expertise in foster care have mechanisms available to them to help hold systems accountable, such as providing ongoing feedback and being part of decision-making at the individual and system levels.

We must increase accountability on all levels to ensure that each young person's foster care experience is positive and results in the best possible outcomes. We can do this by elevating youth voices and making necessary changes for the health, safety, and overall well-being of current and former foster youth. Specifically, we can:

- meaningfully engage youth voice as part of the Citizen Foster Care Review Board, which helps to ensure that permanency for at-risk children remains the central objective of the courts and the cabinet
- utilizing specific approaches to authentic youth engagement in transition planning and policy and practice change
- incorporate youth and young adult voice and expertise in the development of support services



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