
RESIDENTIAL FOSTER CARE ANALYSIS REPORT

Featuring Interviews of Youth with Lived Experience and Recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kentucky Youth Advocates and True Up Kentucky, with the support of Casey Family Programs, conducted in-person and video interviews with various groups in order to better understand their experience within institutional and residential foster care settings. These groups included 46 young adults between the ages of 18-26 who have received services in institutional or residential settings within Kentucky's child welfare system.

Residential and institutional facilities are most often used for youth experiencing crises and these settings are often over-utilized, disproportionately for youth of color and older youth, due to lack of family-based foster care options rather than a clinical need for the placement.

The Residential Foster Care Analysis Report, released by Kentucky Youth Advocates, hopes to highlight the issues often seen in residential treatment programs and institutional placements and to make recommendations in order to improve the outcomes of youth entering these facilities or prevent youth from unnecessarily entering in the first place.

Some key findings from the report include themes of failure within the system, specifically:

- Failure to respond appropriately to both basic and comprehensive needs of the kids in care;
- Failure to prepare young adults for independence, and;
- Failure to support and properly equip staff working on the frontlines with youth.

Alongside a team of young adults with their own residential and institutional experience, Kentucky Youth Advocates has crafted recommendations believe to be solutions to some of the challenges present in this system.

The report includes systemic, longer-term recommendations like extending access to healthcare coverage beyond age 26 for young people who have residential/institutional placements due to dependency, neglect or abuse, as well as recommendations that are easier to implement such as posting a copy of the Foster Youth Bill of Rights in a visible area of every residential facility.

While the report contains many negative stories and outcomes from the youth interviewed, we can find hope in that if everyone does their part to fulfill the recommendations presented, we can exist in a world where, when necessary, residential and institutional placements can be safer and more effective for youth and young adult treatment within the child welfare system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For state policy change:

- Establish an independent Ombudsman that provides oversight of the child welfare system by investigating concerns of safety and well-being, identifying systemic issues related to administration or practice, and making recommendations for improvements
- Require training for residential and other non-clinical facility staff in Mental Health First Aid, including common symptoms and appropriate responses
- Extend access to healthcare coverage beyond age 26 for young people who have residential or institutional placements due to dependency, neglect or abuse
- Increase opportunities for youth in residential or institutional care to enter into relative or fictive kin placements with robust transitional supports for the youth and their families, like the Kinship Treatment Foster Care Initiative
- Ensure that education programming for youth in state care (A6 programs) is accountable and equitable in terms of finance, governance, and learning outcomes and take into account provisions included in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
- Require teachers at A6 programs within residential or institutional placements to receive trauma-informed care training
- Review and study the current Medicaid reimbursement rates provided for needed services to ensure children have access to high-quality services provided by high-quality staff

Access the Residential Foster Care Analysis Report and full list of recommendations at kyyouth.org.



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