Issues Facing Youth Aging Out of Foster Care
Community Youth Forum
12 March 2008
Front Street Station
Northumberland, PA

Putting things in perspective...
- Riding a bike…
- Training wheels?...

National average for women leaving home is age 26 and for men age 27.

Problems Faced by Youth in Care
- Stigma that they are “bad youth”
- Separation from family - abandonment, abuse and neglect; unresolved issues with family
- Multiple placements and changes in schools
- Loss of credits for high school work
- Low Self-Esteem, shame, fears
- Psychological Issues, PTSD, developmental delays; late or lack of diagnoses/treatment

Problems Faced by Youth in Care
- Few opportunities to practice life skills
- Lack of appropriate role models
- No mentors to guide their development
- Goal-setting discussions are often delayed until they reach age 16;
- Sense of powerlessness and frustration
- Not encouraged or expected to stay in care

Problems Faced by Youth in Care
- Anger, depression
- Risky behaviors
- Peer Pressure
- Oppositional behaviors
- Not encouraged to give back through service to others or sharing talents in community

National Trends
More than 25,000 youth are discharged from substitute care annually in the U.S.

Homelessness
- Between 25% - 40% of foster care youth become homeless upon discharge from care

Education
- Over 1/3 of foster care youth in a recent study had received neither a high school diploma or GED compared to fewer than 10% of their same-age peers
National Trends

Foster Care alumni are more than 6 times more likely to earn a GED than general population
Employment rate is far lower than their peers
16.8% receive public or cash assistance
33.2% have household incomes at or below the poverty level
33% have no health insurance

National Trends

Managing Daily Living
- Young adults leaving care were *twice as likely* as other 19 year olds to report *not having enough money to pay rent* or pay a utility bill
- And *four times as likely to report being evicted*
- Only 46% of the former foster youth had a savings or checking account compared to nearly 82% of their same-age peers

Pennsylvania Trends

- 5,611 youth in care over the age of 16
- Over 1000 “age out” of care each year.
- Only 14% of youth go on to post-secondary education
- Less than 2% graduate from college in 5 years.

Helping Youth Prepare – Challenges faced by agencies

- Youth have 1.4 placement changes per year (mean); average time in placement is 6.1 years
- 54.4% with one or more Mental Health issues
- Traditional focus on safety, but not on permanency or well-being
- Liability fears; don’t allow youth to have age- or developmentally appropriate experiences
- Don’t start transition or Independent Living preparation early enough.

Numbers of Youth

In this region, according to figures from the Department of Public Welfare (2007, AFCARS):
- 300+ youth in substitute care ages 16-18
- 800+ youth ages 19-23 who transitioned from substitute care
- Not counted: youth involved with human service agencies who were never placed
**Challenges faced by Agencies**

- Permanency for older youth was/is not a priority
- Sequential case management
- Fewer permanent resources available for services and training for older youth
- Families and significant adults in the youths’ lives have limited or no involvement in permanency planning process; deficit focus

**Issues for Planning Consideration**

- Safety
- Well-being

**Safety**

- Medical care (physical and mental health)
- Basic Safety
- Problem-solving around risk-taking
- Idea of long-term safety net
- Safe Housing
- Sexual behaviors/prevention
- Conflict resolution skills

**Permanency**

- Connections to family
- Relationships
- Continuity
- Sibling Connection
- Cultural Identity
- Birth Family Resolution
- Youth Driven Planning
- Holiday Traditions
- Expanded definition of family
- Access to skill training
- Interdependence on community
- Ability to return

**Well-Being**

- On-going needs
- Love
- Acceptance
- Making peace with the past
- Marketable skills
- Know Rights
- “Have I mattered to people?”
- Connections to peers
- Self-esteem
- Mental Health
- Resiliency
- Ties to people from past
- Developmentally and age appropriate behavior and mistakes

**Transition/Discharge Planning**

- Planning is critical piece of any transition
- Should be done at least 6 months before transition
- Must include resources and be specific with regard to housing, employment, education, life skills, wellness and supports
- Youth and trusted adult involvement is key
- Develop a back-up plan with follow-up
Best Practices
- Involve/Engage Youth
- Start Early
- Expectations
- Goals
- Partnerships

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Organizational Support
- Promote organizational culture that sees youth participation as valuable and feasible
- Ensure that youth are present when decisions are made that affect the plan – “Nothing about me without me.”

During the Meeting: Creating a Safe Environment
- Make sure that environment feels safe to youth
- Everyone must respect each other and the opinions/views that they express – especially youth, biological family and support people
- Remain strengths-based and solution-focused
- Stick to agenda that youth has helped create

During the Meeting: Creating a Safe Environment -- continued
- Make sure that everyone can understand what is going on
- Learn how to talk in ways that don’t hurt the youth or other participants
- Be patient

During the Meeting: Ensure that the Youth is part of the Team
- Structure discussion to ensure that youth has opportunities to express ideas
- Ensure that what youth says matters and has an impact on discussions and decisions
- Structure decision-making so that collaboration is stressed
- Make youth’s talents, assets and strengths focus of meeting and part of plan
During the Meeting: Ensure that the Youth is part of the Team

- Be sure that everyone, including youth, understands the decisions that are made and the next steps
- Concurrent planning – what if…?

What You Can Do – Schools

- Make sure that youth feel welcomed/don’t give up
- Encourage school flexibility with credits and IEP
- Encourage strengths identification and goal development
- Encourage activities and involvement
- Refer to Upward Bound and SAP
- Communicate with service providers
- Education Blueprint developed by ABA/JLC

What you can do - Community

- Advocacy for youth rights to education
- Work to erase stigmas and promote understanding and youth/family involvement in planning and decision-making
- Include youth in assessment of programs, planning and service delivery
- School and college/university partnerships with foster youth-serving systems
- Advocate for legislative changes

Resources for Transition

Pitt/CWTP/IL Project
SWAN www.diakon-swan.org
www.PHEAA.org/
www.EducationPlanner.org
Casey Family Programs
4-H/Cooperative Ext.
CareerLink/WIA/OVR/
Upward Bound/SAP
ACT 101/EOP/HEOP

More Resources

- Juvenile Law Center – www.jlc.org
- Educational Law Center – www.elc.org
- Local colleges and universities, especially career/student services; student service groups
- Banks
- Housing authorities
- Youth Advisory Board (www.independentlivingpa.org)

Thank You.

If you have questions, please contact me:
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