Fact Sheet 2012

The Aging Out Dilemma and Foster Care in Florida

WHAT IS THE AGING OUT DILEMMA?

Each year approximately 24,000 American teens turn 18 years old in foster care and head out into the world alone. At age 18, they become too old to remain in state custody and are emancipated to live independently, which is called “aging out.” Many are still in high school, and they must find a job, a place to live and transportation. Although most are extremely eager to venture out on their own, very few have the resources, role models, and life skills necessary to be successful. When young people in foster care become legal adults, they are often given the choice to sink or swim without the safety net of a loving family to support and guide them. If they are unable to manage on their own and have no support system in place, many end up homeless, get involved with drugs and resort to a life of crime. This impacts government budgets and the quality of life in our communities.

WHO IS AGING OUT?

Youth in foster care are considered adults at the age of 18 and are released from state custody. Without parental guidance and mentoring, these young people are left to fend for themselves. They must find transportation, jobs, clothing, and lodging as an adult, usually while still enrolled in high school. Those who have spent their childhood in the foster care system usually have lived in several foster homes, switched schools, transferred to new cities, visited different therapists, or have different case workers. This unstable lifestyle makes it difficult to successfully manage in and adult world.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER FOSTER CARE?

Without supportive relationships or positive role models, youth who leave foster care often struggle with homelessness, legal issues, and poverty. Within two years after foster care, six out of ten will be homeless, incarcerated, or dead. Most of these youth may not have graduated from high school and studies have shown that only two percent of Florida’s foster care children graduate from college, despite being provided free tuition from the State. They do not have mentors or parental figures they can rely upon in the event of financial difficulties or challenges.

WHAT IS LACKING?

Essential assets that their peers rely on like:

- Having a driver’s license
- Entry-level work experience
- Educational achievement
- Social problem solving ability to advance in complex institutions
- Role Models
- Finances to meet necessary needs

A special thanks to FCSW Intern, Juanita Williams, for her assistance in creating this report.

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Sources:
http://www.thedledger.com/article/20090920/NEWS/909205101/template-printart

Stats

In Florida, 1,365 children aged out of Foster Care without a family in 2008, according to the Department of Children and Families. Of those:

- 1 in 4 will be incarcerated within the first two years after they leave the system.
- More than 20% will become homeless at some point after age 18.
- Approx. 58% had a high school degree at age 19, compared to 87% of a national comparison group of non-foster youth.
- Less than 3% earn their college degree by the age of 25 compared to the general population of 28%.

Florida’s Foster Care System:

- A child is abused or neglected every 10 minutes.
- 50,239 children are victims of abuse or neglect each year.
- 18,753 children are in state care.
- 3,385 children are adopted from foster care each year.

Aged out youth on average:

- Spend 6 years in the foster care system
- Move 1.4 times every year
- Live in more than 4 different placements

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**RISK FACTORS FOR YOUTH LEAVING THE FOSTER SYSTEM**

**Homelessness**
Many youth who aged out of foster care report being homeless at least once since their discharge from foster care services. At such a critical stage of the development when these young adults should be establishing themselves as independent members of society, most struggle with finding housing on their own. Many end up on the street or in homeless shelters for a significant periods, often persisting throughout their lives.

**Health & Well-being**
Upon leaving foster care, many youth face issues relating to their mental and physical well-being. Unexpected pregnancies are common. The instability of housing situations, limited life skills, the yearning for love and something to nurture, contribute to the early childbearing. This group is at an increased risk for poor individual and relational adjustment. Mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, among others, puts them at greater risks for negative outcomes when they are released from care and have no support system in place.

**Employment & Job Training**
Limited work histories and job training make it difficult to find employment, and many of these young adults work low-paying jobs making them vulnerable to poverty and increased difficulty establishing their own independence. Poor job preparation and limited skills training place these youth at a disadvantage in the job market. In a multi-state study of youth exiting the foster care system, three-fourths reported not getting any type of career counseling and over 50% reported no training in regards to job application or interviewing.

**Substance Use & Abuse**
Foster care youth are at a higher than normal risk for substance use and abuse. In this population, illegal drugs are used for experimentation and peer pressure, self-medication due to lack of health care, and coping mechanisms for stress. Substance use in former foster care youth is high, often higher than that found in their peers who have no foster care history.

**Areas For Change**
- Education
- Training
- Housing options
- Continuation of mental & physical health care
- Programs that target specific needs to better prepare them for independence
- Greater number of support networks
- Employment assistance prior to discharge

**What Determines Risk**
Youth who report negative experiences had more foster care placements, fewer support networks, and less education or formal training.

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**Sources:**
http://www.fostercarecouncil.org/about/facts.html

**More Information:**
- Forever Family: 912 E. Broward Blvd. Suite C Fort Lauderdale, 33301 office: 1-888-365-FAMILY fax: 954-533-3797
- Explore Adoption: In Florida: 1-800-96-ADOPT Outside FL: 1-904-353-0679 www.adoptflorida.org
- Children’s Home Society of Florida Corporate Office: 1485 S. Semoran Blvd. # 1448 Winter Park, FL 32792 (321)397-3000

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