

## 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



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## 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

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## 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

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## 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



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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## National Trends

### Pregnancy

- By approximately 19 years of age nearly half of the foster youth in a recent study became pregnant compared to their same-age peers of which only 20% had become pregnant
- Average age of discharge from foster care is 18 years old compared to the national average age youth leave their parents' homes, which is 26-27 years old

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## 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.

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## Numbers of Youth

In this region, according to figures from the Department of Public Welfare (2007, AFCARS):

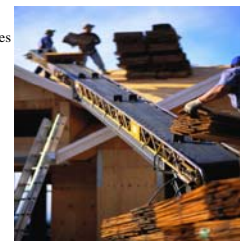
- 300+ youth in substitute care ages 16-18
- 800+ youth ages 19-23 who transitioned from substitute care
- Not counted: youth involved with human service agencies who were never placed

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## 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;



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## 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

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## Issues for Planning Consideration

- ❑ Safety
- ❑ Permanency
- ❑ Well-being



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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## Best Practices

- ❑ Involve/Engage Youth
- ❑ Start Early
- ❑ Expectations
- ❑ Goals
- ❑ Partnerships



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## Involving Youth (handout)

- ❑ Organizational Support for Participation
- ❑ Helping Youth to Prepare for Meetings
- ❑ During the Meeting: Create a Safe Environment
- ❑ During the Meeting: Ensure that the Youth is part of the Team
- ❑ Measuring Participation and Empowerment

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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.”



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## 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

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## 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



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## 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

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## 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....?



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## 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

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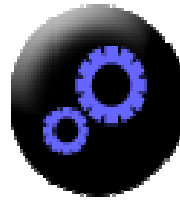
## What you can do - Community

- ❑ 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

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## Resources for Transition



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

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## More Resources

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

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## Thank You.



If you have questions, please contact me:  
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