

**National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth)**

**Supporting Foster Youth to Achieve Employment and Economic  
Self-Sufficiency**

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) is composed of partners with expertise in disability, education, employment, and workforce development issues. NCWD/Youth is housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, DC. The Collaborative is charged with assisting state and local workforce development systems to integrate youth with disabilities into their service strategies.

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This paper was developed through the work of several people. The lead author for the background was Paul DiLorenzo, ACSW, MLSP, with the assistance of Veronica Hemrich, Esq.; they provided the knowledge and content about the needs of youth in foster care system and how the child welfare system is organized and identified the promising practices. David Brown, of the National Youth Employment Coalition provided insight on how workforce development programs have become engaged in assisting this highly vulnerable population prepare for the world of work, Curtis Richards and Rhonda Basha provided significant insights for Section II of the document and Joan Wills contributed substantial review of drafts. All of this work was enhanced by members of an expert panel of foundation representatives, practitioners, national organizations, and researchers that were convened by the Collaborative to provide comments and recommendations based upon an earlier draft.

## Introduction

For children and youth in the foster care system, life's ordinary challenges and opportunities frequently become extraordinary. Nationally, there has been a growing recognition and concern that these challenges and opportunities are even more pronounced for young people who transition out of the foster care system when they reach their teen years. Many of these youth also have disabilities. Of the more than 500,000 children in foster care, 30 to 40 percent are also in special education. However this number does not capture everyone, particularly those that have reached adolescence when mental and emotional forms of disabilities often manifest themselves. In one study an estimate was made that between 20% and 60% of young children entering foster care have a developmental disability or delay. These types of disabilities include cerebral palsy, mental retardation, developmental delays, and learning disabilities, as well as speech, hearing, and vision impairments. This compares with an estimate of about 10% among the general population.<sup>1</sup> These are estimates that vary but the numbers are significant, and clearly show that the over-representation of disabilities is a serious issue within the youth in foster care population and adds to the complexity of the situation. Yet, the developmental tasks and goals are the same as they are for *any* young person.

Between 18,000 and 20,000 youth aged 16 and older transition from the foster care system each year.<sup>2</sup> These youth have spent, on average, about six years in care, with disproportionate numbers of young people of color, especially males, remaining in foster care for longer periods of time. (See the work of Dorothy Roberts in her book, *The Color of Child Welfare*). Despite these numbers, relatively few studies have examined how youth in foster care, including those who are disabled, have fared during and after transition. What is known about disabled youth in particular is that they face extraordinary challenges in the areas of mental health, education, employment and finances:

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<sup>1</sup> *Comprehensive Assessments for Children Entering Foster Care: A National Perspective*, PEDIATRICS Vol. 112 No. 1 July 2003, pp. 134-

<sup>2</sup> *Improving Family Foster Care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs. Available at <http://www.casey.org>.

- A majority (just under four-fifths) of all adult foster care alumni have significant mental health disabilities, with one in four (25.2%) experiencing post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) within the previous 12 months.<sup>3</sup>
- Almost one-third lack any kind of health insurance.
- Their employment rate was lower than that of the general population with no more than 45% of transitioned youth reporting earnings in any one quarter over a thirteen-quarter period.<sup>4</sup>
- One third have incomes at or below the poverty level—earning less than \$6,000 per year in wages—substantially below the federal poverty level of \$7,890 for a single individual and almost a quarter experience homelessness after leaving care.<sup>5</sup>
- A disproportionately high number of former foster care youth complete high school via a GED and not a regular diploma.
- Large numbers of youth exit care without assurance of any stable housing.

Successful transition, for youth, ages 14 to 23 years, means that upon leaving the care of the public child welfare system, a young person is pre-disposed to a life of meaning and purpose.

The transition is characterized by:

- Their connection to family, peers and caring adults;
- The completion of age appropriate educational levels;
- A safe and stable place to live;
- An opportunity for career exploration and employment;
- An understanding of how to manage financial assets; and
- Opportunities for social and civic engagement<sup>6</sup>

In many areas of life that help ensure success—especially a place to live, employment, education, and personal and emotional well-being—foster care youth have consistently poorer outcomes than non-foster care youth. However, despite “...a lack of experience on the ground

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<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup> *Meeting the Job Training Needs of Youth*, Darryl Hamm - Youth Law Center.

<sup>5</sup> *Improving Family Foster Care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs. Available at <http://www.casey.org>. See also *Employment Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care*, Robert M. Goerge, Principal Investigator, University of Chicago, Chapin Hall Center for Children.

<sup>6</sup> Visit the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities website for more information on successful transition

level of how to provide effective services to this population”<sup>7</sup> there is compelling evidence that a variety of emerging effective practices and approaches can contribute to the increased well-being of *all* youth transitioning out of the foster care system.

This paper will highlight, especially for those professionals in the youth education, employment and workforce domains, the unique characteristics of the young people who leave, or “age out” of the foster care system each year. This system is an interesting hybrid of legal and clinical which means a constant interaction of the court, lawyers, social workers, and other support systems. Though more consideration is being given to the voice of the youth in their life planning, the foster care system has a long way to go before it could be described as inclusive. Up to the age of 18 years, foster youth are caught in the middle of many adult professionals.

Age 18 is the recognized age of majority and past this age the individual is expected to make their own “adult decisions.” However, there is an increasing awareness that a “transition cliff” occurs and few young people are able to go it alone without strong supports.

The framework for examining this population is being done within the context of *Guideposts for Success*, developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP).<sup>8</sup> These *Guideposts* identify a range of opportunities, supports, and services that all foster youth, including those with disabilities, need in order to transition from adolescence to productive adulthood and citizenship. An increased understanding of the challenges facing this population of young people, combined with an enhanced level of coordination among the education, workforce, post-secondary and child welfare systems, will increase the likelihood of personal and systemic success. This coordination is also a necessary precursor for the leveraging (“blending” or “braiding”) of resources among the partners. Finally,

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<sup>7</sup> *Foster Care Transition: Tools for Improving Youth Programs*. Concept Paper submitted to Casey Family Programs by David Brown, National Youth Employment Coalition. December 2004. For more information go to the NYEC website at <http://www.nyec.org>.

<sup>8</sup> *Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities of Youth Service Practitioners: The Centerpiece of a Successful Workforce Development System*. McCain, M; Gill, P; Wills, J; Larson, M. May 2004. NCWD /Youth. [www.ncwd-youth.info](http://www.ncwd-youth.info). See also, *Building, Developing, and Going to Scale: Grant Funded Programs for Youth in Transition, A Technical Assistance Tool for Navigating the Road to Work. Module 1: Collaboration and Relationship Building*. Paul DiLorenzo, ACSW, MLSP, for the Institute for Educational Leadership. January 2005.

the *Guideposts* can support an infrastructure for the measurement of outcomes for foster youth in transition, especially as it relates to their economic self-sufficiency. See Section II for a discussion of the Guideposts including specific references to what youth in foster care need to transition successfully.

### **Developmental Tasks in the Context of the Foster Care Experience**

The developmental tasks for most adolescents are well known. Years of research have identified factors contributing to the successful completion of these tasks, as well as the consequences that result when a child's dreams and hopes are deferred.

When thinking about youth in foster care, certain "ordinary" adolescent and teen competencies become particularly relevant: increased independence; separation from the family; exploration of career opportunities; enhanced competencies to organize social and financial assets; educational achievements; and, self-confidence. Ideally, the foundation for these competencies begins early in a child's life. Unfortunately, it is exactly at that early stage when many foster care youth begin to experience serious disruptions in their daily routines.

Children enter foster care primarily because of serious abuse, neglect, unstable living conditions, parental abandonment, and voluntary placements by the family as the result of parental inability to manage the behavior of a child. Many of these children come with significant developmental delays, as well as emotional trauma. The necessary stable base of support, especially in early childhood, is inconsistent for some, and totally lacking for many. Thus, the developmental tasks associated with the adolescent and teen years become even more challenging. Frequent moves from one home to another, separation from siblings and extended separation from the child's family of origin leave only a limited opportunity for compensating influences.

"Most youth enter foster care as a last resort because family support efforts were unsuccessful. These youth have a family history and life experiences that are detrimental to their well-being and safety. The very act of removal from their parents is often traumatic for the youth as well, potentially resulting in post-traumatic stress disorder

(PTSD) and creating a sense of hyper vigilance because their lives become unpredictable.”<sup>9</sup>

This finding was part of a recent study done under the auspices of Casey Family Programs. The study, *Improving Family Foster Care*, demonstrates that the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is much higher in adult foster care alumni than in the general population. Researchers found that a majority (just under four-fifths) of all adult foster care alumni have significant mental health disabilities, with one in four (25.2%) experiencing PTSD within the previous 12 months. By way of comparison, American war veterans have lower rates of PTSD at 15% for Vietnam, 6% for Afghanistan, and 12% to 13% for Iraq Veterans.<sup>10</sup>

The study confirms the reality that trauma experienced by youth while in foster care often leads to debilitating mental health disorders and can result in significant, long-term disabilities well into adulthood. Systemic issues, that are not endemic to the family or the child, also increase instability for foster care youth and further underscore the need to improve mental health services for these youth, both during and after their stay in foster care.

Relatively few studies have examined how youth in foster care, including those who are disabled, have fared during and after transition or as adults. What is known, however, is that the majority of youth who have transitioned from foster care still face major challenges in the areas of mental health, education and employment.

- One third had incomes at or below the poverty level, with on average earning less than \$6,000 per year in wages, substantially below the federal poverty level of \$7,890 for a single individual;<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *IMPROVING FAMILY FOSTER CARE—Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study*. Revised March 14, 2005. Compiled by Peter J. Pecora, Ronald C. Kessler, Jason Williams, Kirk O’Brien, A. Chris Downs, Diana English, James White, Eva Hiripi, Catherine Roller White, Tamera Wiggins, and Kate Holmes. Retrieved from <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/NorthwestAlumniStudy.html> September 23, 2005

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*, at pp. 1—3.

<sup>11</sup> *Employment Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care*, Robert M. Goerge, Principal Investigator, University of Chicago, Chapin Hall Center for Children, March 2002. Available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/fostercare-agingout02>

- One-third had no health insurance; and nearly a quarter had experienced homelessness after leaving foster care.<sup>12</sup>
- More than half of the adults formerly in foster care had clinical levels of at least one mental health problem within the previous twelve months (depression, social phobia, panic syndrome, anxiety and post traumatic stress syndrome).<sup>13</sup>
- A disproportionately high number of youth who were formerly in foster care completed high school via a GED and experienced more than seven school changes from elementary through high school.<sup>14</sup>
- Their employment rate was lower than that of the general population with no more than 45% of emancipated youth reporting earnings in any one quarter over a thirteen-quarter period of one study.<sup>15</sup>
- They also lacked health insurance at almost twice the rate of the general population.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, youth who have left foster care are more likely than those in the general population to not have finished high school, be unemployed, and be dependent on public assistance. They are also associated with other negative outcomes including higher than average mental health problems, drug usage, and involvement with the criminal justice system. A growing body of knowledge indicates that these youth need community-wide webs of support to make the transition to adulthood successfully.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Guideposts for Success**

Both research and experience show that *all* youth, including foster youth, need access to high quality standards-based education; information and exposure to career options; opportunities to

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<sup>12</sup> Improving Family Foster Care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs, 2005. Available at <http://www.casey.org>.

<sup>13</sup> Id.

<sup>14</sup> Id.

<sup>15</sup> Meeting the Job Training Needs of Youth in *It's My Life: Employment, A Guide For Transition Services from Casey Family Programs*, Darryl Hamm, Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs, 2004. Available at <http://www.casey.org>.

<sup>16</sup> Improving Family Foster Care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs, 2005. Available at <http://www.casey.org>.

<sup>17</sup> Brown, D (2004). *Foster Care Transition: Tools for Improving Youth Programs*. Unpublished concept paper submitted to Casey Family Programs National Youth Employment Coalition. Washington, D.C.

develop social, civic and leadership skills; strong connections to caring adults; access to safe places to interact with their peers; and, independent living/support services.<sup>18</sup> Following these principles, the *Guideposts for Success*, found in Section II, are intended to help families, institutions and youth through transition processes. Individually and as a whole, the *Guideposts* underscore the reality that no one institution or organization can provide the full range of services needed by these youth—they reveal the interdependence of agencies, communities, states, the federal government, and multiple organizations at all levels and highlight the critical need for collaboration in order to help assure quality transitions for all youth.<sup>19</sup>

As communities begin the process of developing plans to improve the connections between systems it will be useful to think about what is needed (e.g. linked case management, sharing of resources, common professional development opportunities, a designated intermediary to act as cross agency facilitator) and more. Section II provides policy makers and practitioners a framework to focus these discussions.

### **The Relevance of the *Guideposts for Success***

For foster care youth, and especially foster care youth with disabilities, the *Guideposts* help to create a unique intersection between the dual experiences of *transition and connectedness*. These terms imply not only the planned or unplanned exit from state care and custody; but also the supports that need to be in place for those foster youth who have additional challenges. Planning and preparing for independent living, providing connections to safe, stable adult relationships (preferably family), creating opportunities for youth to develop advocacy skills, and engaging youth in all of these activities are among the key principles that join the *Guideposts* and effective child welfare practice as it relates to transition from foster care.

Young people who leave foster care have an increased likelihood for economic stability and success if there is an intentional, integrated and well-coordinated set of supports in place. Their active involvement in the planning and service delivery of these supports is essential.

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<sup>18</sup> Id.

<sup>19</sup> *Guideposts for Success*. [http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources\\_&\\_Publications/guideposts/index.html](http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources_&_Publications/guideposts/index.html) January 2005. NCWD/Youth.

Additionally, the connection to a permanent family member or an adult of meaning is a critical element in the equation for success. Rarely, however, do all of these factors converge, hence the resulting poor outcomes.

### **Developing a Strategy for Economic Self-Sufficiency and Asset-Building Opportunities for Foster Youth**

As the above information indicates, there are compelling challenges for transitioning foster youth. Those challenges are both personal and systemic. A well-conceived approach to economic self-sufficiency for this population has the potential to address both the social and emotional concerns of the youth, as well as the traditionally inadequate response by the child welfare system. Recent approaches seem to emphasize the theme of *connectedness*; connecting the youth to the critical supports necessary for success and thus to the mainstream and connecting the foster youth to significant adults who can encourage and guide the way.

The Institute for American Values issued a report this past year, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities*, which examined the barriers to adolescent and teen success. In the report, the panel of contributors observes, "... We are designing more and more special programs for "at risk" children. These approaches are necessary. But they are not enough...Because individual programs...seldom encourage us, and can even prevent us, from recognizing as a society the broad environmental conditions...."<sup>20</sup> The contributors point to the lack of *connectedness* to social institutions as a primary reason for why so many youth do not succeed. Other recent studies looking at the possibilities for success by foster youth point to the integral role that hope plays in the life of the young person. This seems to be directly influenced by their belief in themselves and the connection to the system that is in place to help them. Understanding that as the context, successful *transition* and *connectedness* for foster youth is possible and is occurring in a number of places.

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<sup>20</sup> ([Hardwired To Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities](#) – downloaded from the Institute for American Values website on April 17, 2005).

## **Current Strategies**

Across the country, multiple innovative strategies to serve youth aging out of foster care have emerged from existing state or community programs.<sup>21</sup>

**The UPS School-to-Career Partnership** in Baltimore, Maryland teaches workplace skills in a hands-on environment to foster care youth. The Maryland Department of Human Resources partnered with the state independent living program, the United Parcel Service (UPS), the Living Classrooms Foundation (a local youth development agency), and the Annie E. Casey Foundation to develop and promote the program. Applicants complete work-readiness training and then most are referred for interviews at the UPS shipping facility in Burtonsville, Maryland, Marriott Hotels, Bank of America, or other local employers. If hired, UPS pays youth participants for their part-time work and provides health benefits. UPS also reimburses youth for tuition at colleges or vocational training programs. Living Classrooms provides transportation to work at the Burtonsville site for up to 40 youth on a weekly basis. Retention services are provided at the job site to help the youth maintain a consistent work ethic. Since its inception in 1999, the UPS School-to-Career Partnership has helped more than 300 youth find employment. The current length of stay on the job for participants exceeds nine months. UPS and the Annie E. Casey Foundation have replicated this program in seven more cities.

**NC LINKS** is North Carolina's independent living program offering services to teens and young adults ages 13 to 20 that are or were in foster care as teenagers. A youth and his or her caregiver complete an objective assessment of the youth's strengths and needs. Then the agency and youth develop a plan based on the assessment, which includes his or her goals, interests, and responsibilities as well as suggested support services. These services could include employment, volunteer activities, one-on-one instruction, group and community activities, specific life-skills training, and/or exposure to educational and vocational resources. All LINKS program activities aim to help participants move toward achieving one or more of the following goals:

- Sufficient income to meet daily needs
- A safe and stable place to live

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<sup>21</sup> The Welfare Information Network (WIN) "Serving Youth Aging Out of Foster Care." Rachel H. Sherman. Volume 8, Number 5, October 2004. Available at <http://www.financeprojectinfo.org>.

- Sufficient academic and/or vocational training for the individual's needs
- Connections to and emotional support from adults in addition to those working within the public child welfare system
- Avoidance of high-risk behaviors
- Postponement of parenthood until the participant is emotionally and financially capable of parenting
- Access to routine health, mental health, and dental health care

North Carolina allocates \$2.1 million of federal and state Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) funds to finance the services provided by each county's department of social services. In addition, \$400,000 is set aside to provide additional funding to reimburse counties for eligible expenditures on behalf of individual youth. These funds, called LINKS Special Funds, are administered at the state level to ensure that each county, regardless of size or program allocation, can access sufficient funding for needed Welfare Information Network items or services. See [www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/c\\_srv/cserv\\_ind.html](http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/c_srv/cserv_ind.html).

**Casey Family Services** in Hartford, Connecticut is a nonprofit child welfare agency providing programs to meet the changing needs of vulnerable children and families. The agency is the direct services arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The program has a strong emphasis on participants' academics and college attendance. It provides information to youth in transition about college opportunities and helps them make connections to colleges and universities. Youth receive college counseling, including an individualized personal education plan; career counseling, including the aid of consultants in identifying well-suited careers; tutoring and mentoring through an alumni association; financial aid through grants, scholarships, and the Casey Foundation; and employment training and work experience. See <http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org/archives/trans.html>.

**The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative** created **The Opportunity Passport™**, an asset development tool to help foster care alumni and youth in care open doors to financial, educational, vocational and entrepreneurial opportunities. The project seeks to help youth in transition develop financial literacy; gain experience with banking; build assets for education,

housing, transportation, and other expenses; and gain entry to training, educational, and vocational opportunities. The Opportunity Passport™ has three components: a personal debit account to be used for short-term expenses; a matched individual development account to be used for medium- and long-term asset building; and benefits to be designed and negotiated on the local level called “door openers.” Door openers could include pre-approval to register for community college courses or expedited access to job-training or adult-education courses. To be eligible, one must be between 14 and 23 years of age, have been in the foster care system at age 14 or older, complete financial literacy training, provide personal information for project evaluation, and live in one of the eligible sites. The Opportunity Passport™ is currently being pilot-tested in 13 sites nationwide. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, and the Marguerite Casey Foundation fund this project, which is being evaluated as a model to help foster youth transition successfully to adulthood.

See <http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/opportunitypassport.html>.

**The Texas /Department /of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)** provides CFCIP services through its **Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Program**, which was implemented in 1986 to help foster care youth prepare for their transition to adulthood. PAL staff or contractors conduct an initial assessment of each PAL participant’s general readiness to live independently when the youth reaches age 16. The results are used to develop specific plans and training to prepare each youth for adult living. A post-assessment is conducted around the time of the youth’s discharge from substitute care. Staff or contractors provide training on independent living skills that include health, job skills, money management, personal and interpersonal skills, housing and transportation, and planning for the future. PAL also provides support services based on need and available funds, including counseling, driver education, volunteer mentoring, vocational assessment and/or training, GED preparation and preparation for college entrance exams, and reimbursement for high school graduation expenses. In addition, if young people meet certain eligibility guidelines, they may receive a transitional living allowance up to \$1,000 once they leave care. Young adults who are between the ages of 18 and 21 and have aged out of the foster care system are eligible for aftercare room and board assistance based on need. Financial assistance up to \$500 per month may be used for rent, food, utilities, and rental deposits. There is a per-client lifetime cap on total assistance of \$3,000; exceptions are made for special or

emergency situations. For 2005 DFPS expects to receive \$5.5 million in Foster Care Independence Act 1999 (Chafee) funds, which will be supplemented by \$1.4 million in state and local matching funds or in-kind matches. DFPS has partnered with Casey Family Programs, a Seattle-based national foundation to improve transitional services for youth aging out of foster care. Through this effort, called the Texas State Strategy (TSS), Casey Family Programs will help DFPS implement best-practice models, approaches and training tools for foster parents and foster care staff on independent living skills. DFPS has adopted the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment as part of this initiative. In addition, DFPS and Casey Family Programs are working on an outcome assessment effort in 2004 and 2005 that will enable DFPS to track what happens to youth after they leave foster care for adult living.

See [http://www.tdprs.state.tx.us/Child\\_Protection/Preparation\\_For\\_Adult\\_Living](http://www.tdprs.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living)

**Philadelphia Department of Human Services Achieving Independence Center- (the AIC)** was established as part of the Department's more integrated approach to service delivery. The AIC was designed to serve the special needs of this population of young people. It has been developed in cooperation with the Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation and the Philadelphia Youth Network. It is a one stop center, serving as a "gateway" to meet the multiple needs of youth in transition. The Center itself is open during non-traditional hours and provides flexible scheduling and individualized plans for each youth. The staff at the Center concentrates on the enhancement of employment, housing and educational opportunities for youth who are between the ages of 16 and 21 years of age, who have been in placement at or after the age of 16 years and who have been adjudicated dependent or dependent/delinquent by the courts.

### **Principles for Programs Supporting Foster Youth**

Each of the above programs has several characteristics or principles in common. These are the *same* principles that drove the formation of the Guideposts for Success. In collaboration with other systems—and in particular the child welfare system—workforce and youth employment organizations can apply these principles when attempting to improve the economic self-sufficiency of young people transitioning from foster care. Program staff should also consider the importance of segmenting age and developmental levels of youth.

Ideally, all foster care-focused programs should be, at a minimum, built upon the ten principles, listed below.

1. Create enhanced educational opportunities which include an attachment to work experiences
2. Create opportunities for academic enrichments for youth who might have unique challenges or disabilities
3. Increase the chances for youth and employers to get involved with each other
4. Increase the opportunities for the youth voice in their life planning
5. Increase financial literacy similar to the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative
6. Provide “connecting” activities (as described in the *Guideposts* )
7. Provide incentives for savings and the accumulation of assets
8. Teach entrepreneurship
9. Connect youth to caring adults and family permanency
10. Engage foster parents and birth siblings whenever possible

## **Moving Forward**

There are several tasks for the youth employment field as it reaches out to foster youth, especially those with disabilities. Providers of services should understand that for foster youth, *transition* and *connectedness* are related concepts and both should be defined in the broadest way possible. When serving foster youth, the workforce system must become proficient at developing strategic partnerships between and among the youth serving providers, the foster youth, and the foster parent. There is a commonsense need for segmenting populations of foster youth by age and developmental capacity, and applying the appropriate strategy for their economic self-sufficiency. The overlay of early childhood trauma, multiple living arrangements, the lack of a permanent family structure, and educational deficits also should also be considered. Life skills preparation for this population should be within the context of reality-based experiences. And economic self-sufficiency for transitioning foster youth should be measured in terms of asset accumulation. However, the overall success for transitioning foster youth will be

defined differently than it is for most youth employment efforts. The combination of personal and systemic challenges and opportunities that distinguish foster youth will frequently test the ability of the current system to think beyond its current comfort zone. Section II provides a roadmap for use by state and local policy makers from several agencies and organizations to do so.

**Section II**  
**GUIDEPOSTS FOR SUCCESS**  
**FOR**  
**YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE**

<b>General Needs</b>	<b>Specific Needs</b>
<b>1. School-Based Preparatory Experiences</b>	<p>In order to perform at optimal levels in all education settings, all youth need to participate in educational programs grounded in standards, clear performance expectations and graduation exit options based upon meaningful, accurate, and relevant indicators of student learning and skills. These should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• academic programs that are based on clear state standards;</li> <li>• career and technical education programs that are based on professional and industry standards;</li> <li>• curricular and program options based on universal design of school, work and community-based learning experiences;</li> <li>• learning environments that are small and safe, including extra supports such as tutoring, as necessary;</li> <li>• supports from and by highly qualified staff;</li> <li>• access to an assessment system that includes multiple measures and,</li> <li>• graduation standards that include options.</li> </ul>
	<p>In addition, youth with disabilities need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use their individual transition plans to drive their personal instruction, and strategies to continue the transition process post-schooling;</li> <li>• access specific and individual learning accommodations while they are in school;</li> <li>• develop knowledge of reasonable accommodations that they can request and control in educational settings, including assessment accommodations; and</li> <li>• be supported by highly qualified transitional support staff that may or may not be school staff.</li> </ul>

General Needs	Specific Needs
	<p data-bbox="556 233 1732 337">Because of the transient nature of the foster care system and the lack of traditional family supports, youth in foster care need stable educational environments and access to additional educational supports and services.</p> <p data-bbox="556 380 1014 410">Youth in foster care may also need:</p> <ul data-bbox="604 418 1780 792" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="604 418 1696 488">• to remain in one educational setting or single school system, to the greatest extent possible;</li> <li data-bbox="604 496 1644 527">• access to diverse re-enrollment opportunities to complete high school studies;</li> <li data-bbox="604 535 1732 605">• additional assistance to assure they master basic skills such as through tutoring, after school programs, and other services;</li> <li data-bbox="604 613 1780 683">• designated staff at the educational setting with primary responsibility for supporting and monitoring their progress toward educational outcomes;</li> <li data-bbox="604 691 1682 722">• access to foster care caseworkers trained to support the educational process; and,</li> <li data-bbox="604 730 1780 792">• educational records stored in a central location and easily retrievable by those who need to access them.</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="556 800 1167 831">Youth in foster care who have disabilities need:</p> <ul data-bbox="604 839 1770 984" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="604 839 1717 909">• to be engaged in creating, modifying and integrating their Individualized Education Program, Transition Plan and/or Independent Living Plan.</li> <li data-bbox="604 917 1770 984">• to be aware that they can bring a non-parental adult, friend, or guardian at litem to their Individualized Education Program meetings.</li> </ul>
<p data-bbox="300 1024 512 1203"><b>2. Career Preparation &amp; Work-Based Learning Experiences</b></p>	<p data-bbox="556 1024 1759 1169">Career preparation and work-based learning experiences are essential in order to form and develop aspirations and to make informed choices about careers. These experiences can be provided during the school day, through after-school programs and will require collaborations with other organizations. All youth need information on career options, including:</p> <ul data-bbox="604 1177 1732 1391" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="604 1177 1732 1247">• career assessments to help identify students’ school and post-school preferences and interests;</li> <li data-bbox="604 1255 1627 1325">• structured exposure to post-secondary education and other life-long learning opportunities;</li> <li data-bbox="604 1333 1732 1391">• exposure to career opportunities that ultimately lead to a living wage, including information about educational requirements, entry requirements, income and benefits</li> </ul>

General Needs	Specific Needs
	<p>potential, and asset accumulation; and,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• training designed to improve job-seeking skills and work-place basic skills (sometimes called soft skills).</li> </ul> <p>In order to identify and attain career goals, youth need to be exposed to a range of experiences, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• opportunities to engage in a range of work-based exploration activities such as site visits and job shadowing;</li> <li>• multiple on-the-job training experiences, including community service (paid or unpaid) that is specifically linked to the content of a program of study and school credit;</li> <li>• opportunities to learn and practice their work skills (“soft skills”); and,</li> <li>• opportunities to learn first-hand about specific occupational skills related to a career pathway.</li> </ul>
	<p>In addition, youth with disabilities need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand the relationships between benefits planning and career choices;</li> <li>• learn to communicate their disability-related work support and accommodation needs;</li> <li>• learn to find, formally request and secure appropriate supports and reasonable accommodations in education, training and employment settings.</li> </ul>
	<p>Because of a lack of family connections and the social and emotional consequences associated with abuse, neglect, and abandonment, youth in and preparing to leave foster care need connections to a full range of youth employment programs and services.</p> <p>Youth in foster care may also need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ongoing career interest assessments such as through the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment;</li> <li>• career exploration, skills building and work-based learning experiences, including entrepreneurship opportunities;</li> <li>• permanent and meaningful connections to significant adults as mentors and role models in an employment and training context; and,</li> <li>• an understanding of how to normalize getting, keeping and transitioning from one job to another;</li> </ul>

General Needs	Specific Needs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent Living Plans that incorporate employment and training programs and services in a way that integrates federal Foster Care Independence Act funds (a.k.a. the Chafee program) to leverage other youth employment opportunities;</li> <li>• employment-based programs that have comprehensive and customized services, including structured work-based learning experiences, for transitioning youth, which in turn are likely to require a formal relationship with a private or public child welfare agency.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Youth Development &amp; Leadership</b>	<p>Youth development is a process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them gain skills and competencies. Youth leadership is part of that process. In order to control and direct their own lives based on informed decisions, all youth need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mentoring activities designed to establish strong relationships with adults through formal and informal settings;</li> <li>• peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities;</li> <li>• exposure to role models in a variety of contexts;</li> <li>• training in skills such as self-advocacy and conflict resolution;</li> <li>• exposure to personal leadership and youth development activities, including community service;</li> <li>• opportunities that allow youth to exercise leadership and build self-esteem.</li> </ul>
	<p>Youth with disabilities also need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mentors and role models including persons with and without disabilities;</li> <li>• an understanding of disability history, culture, and disability public policy issues as well as their rights and responsibilities.</li> </ul>
	<p>Because there is an expectation that they will live independently by age 18, youth in foster care need special attention to the development of social and emotional skills for dealing with the consequences of abuse, neglect, and abandonment.</p> <p>Youth in foster care may also need:</p>

General Needs	Specific Needs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• formal and informal connections to significant adult role models, peer mentors and older youth who have transitioned from foster care to independence;</li> <li>• additional emphasis on training in self advocacy, self esteem, self reliance, self determination, and self sufficiency;</li> <li>• ongoing assessments of personal development such as through the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment;</li> <li>• programs with built-in activities such as “rites of passage” or special recognition of accomplishments;</li> <li>• Independent Living Plans that incorporate cross organizational support systems which promote youth development and leadership;</li> <li>• opportunities to participate in advocacy and civic engagements such as through volunteer and leadership roles with foster care boards and associations;</li> <li>• connections to services through youth-driven independent living planning meetings which include family members and/or foster parents;</li> <li>• connections to lifetime networks of support activities such as foster care alumni associations; and,</li> <li>• exposure to cultural, ethnic, religious, and gender-specific experiences as well as culturally competent mentors, peers and program staff.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Connecting Activities</b></p>	<p>Young people need to be connected to programs, services, activities, and supports that help them gain access to chosen post-school options. All youth may need one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mental and physical health services;</li> <li>• transportation;</li> <li>• tutoring</li> <li>• financial planning and management;</li> <li>• post-program supports thorough structured arrangements in postsecondary institutions and adult service agencies;</li> <li>• connection to other services and opportunities (e.g., recreation).</li> </ul>

General Needs	Specific Needs
	<p data-bbox="558 240 989 272">Youth with disabilities may need:</p> <ul data-bbox="604 285 1766 659" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="604 285 1276 318">• acquisition of appropriate assistive technologies;</li> <li data-bbox="604 331 1766 396">• community orientation and mobility training (e.g. accessible transportation, bus routes, housing, health clinics);</li> <li data-bbox="604 409 1671 474">• exposure to post-program supports such as independent living centers and other consumer-driven community-based support service agencies;</li> <li data-bbox="604 487 1734 552">• personal assistance services, including attendants, readers, interpreters, or other such services; and</li> <li data-bbox="604 565 1724 659">• benefits planning counseling including information regarding the myriad of benefits available and their interrelationships so that they may maximize those benefits in transitioning from public assistance to self-sufficiency.</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="558 672 1780 808">Because of a lack of family connections and the legal expectation that they are to be independent at age 18, youth in foster care need connections to a host of programs and services, particularly in the critical areas of physical and mental health, additional education, employment, housing and income support programs.</p> <p data-bbox="558 854 1010 886">Youth in foster care may also need:</p> <ul data-bbox="604 899 1787 1222" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="604 899 1787 997">• opportunities to obtain and maintain a valid driver’s license, library card, voter registration card, birth certificates, medical and other treatment records, green cards, and other critical personal documents;</li> <li data-bbox="604 1010 1167 1042">• both transitional and long term housing;</li> <li data-bbox="604 1055 1759 1120">• safety education which prepares them to maintain their safety in personal relationships and in independent living situations;</li> <li data-bbox="604 1133 1163 1166">• parenting education and child care; and,</li> <li data-bbox="604 1179 1682 1222">• state and local foster care caseworkers and managers partnering with community providers and businesses to foster connections within these domains.</li> </ul>
<p data-bbox="302 1234 516 1338"><b>5. Family Involvement &amp; Supports</b></p>	<p data-bbox="558 1234 1766 1338">Participation and involvement of parents, family members, and/or other caring adults promotes the social, emotional, physical, academic and occupational growth of youth, leading to better post-school outcomes. All youth need parents, families, and other caring adults who have:</p> <ul data-bbox="604 1351 1745 1408" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="604 1351 1745 1408">• high expectations which build upon the young person’s strengths, interests, and needs and fosters their ability to achieve independence and self-sufficiency;</li> </ul>

General Needs	Specific Needs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• been involved in their lives and assisting them toward adulthood;</li> <li>• access to information about employment, further education and community resources;</li> <li>• taken an active role in transition planning with schools and community partners;</li> <li>• access to medical, professional and peer support networks.</li> </ul> <p>In addition, youth with disabilities need parents, families and other caring adults who have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an understanding of their youth’s disability and how it affects his or her education, employment and/or daily living options;</li> <li>• knowledge of rights and responsibilities under various disability-related legislation;</li> <li>• knowledge of and access to programs, services, supports and accommodations available for young people with disabilities; and,</li> <li>• an understanding of how individualized planning tools can assist youth in achieving transition goals and objectives.</li> </ul> <p>Family reunification is a difficult challenge that cannot be separated from the young person’s desires to go to work, pursue additional education and live independent lives. Because of the diversity of family experiences and living situations, youth in foster care need systems that recognize an expanded definition of “family” which includes non-relative, caring adults and takes into consideration unique cultural issues and practices. These systems need to promote permanency, identify and help build a support network of family member(s), peers, mentors, and/or significant adult(s) to be included in all aspects of life planning for the young person.</p> <p>Youth in foster care may also need birth parents and siblings, foster families, group homes, caseworkers, case managers, and/or significant adults who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participate in “family” team planning that provides opportunities for collaborations among the service providers and the youth;</li> <li>• can work with the court system (e.g. attorneys, court appointed special advocates (CASAs), and guardians ad litem (GAL)) to be aware of, assess and support each young person’s needs, desires and planning process for education, employment and independent living options; and,</li> <li>• have knowledge of their and the young person’s rights and responsibilities under child welfare, transition and youth-related legislation.</li> </ul>

General Needs	Specific Needs
	<p data-bbox="558 237 1751 305">Additionally, youth in foster care who have disabilities need birth parents and siblings, foster families, group homes, caseworkers, case managers, and/or significant adults who:</p> <ul data-bbox="606 313 1787 492" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="606 313 1787 418">• understand and are trained in recognizing, assisting and supporting youth in dealing with the social and emotional consequences of having been abused, neglected and/or abandoned as a direct result of their disability(ies); and,</li><li data-bbox="606 427 1787 492">• know how to access and make connections to and between the child welfare system and various disability programs and services.</li></ul>