

FOSTER YOUTH: WHAT HAPPENS AFTER?

Samantha Jacoby, MSW Student

Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College
May 24, 2016

Introduction



- Youth who age out of the foster care system are not being taught needed transitional skills
- Since youth are not shown necessary skills, they have the risk of ending up homeless, incarcerated, unemployed and left to be on government based benefits for most of their life
- Increasing the length of time in the system and housing programs have been made available, but not specifically for the youth who age out of the system
- Youth who age out of the system should be guaranteed transitional housing as well as services to teach them life skill

Defining the Problem

- In NYC, there are 11,000 youth accounted for in the foster care system
- Approximately 800 of these youth "age out" of the foster care system every year (aging out of the foster care system simply means children "who have reached adulthood without returning to their birth families or being adopted")
- Due to lack of funding, there is often no continuity between in care and post services for these children that age out of the system

Bosman, J. (2010). City is Urged to Evaluate Foster Care. Retrieved April 23, 2016, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/15/nyregion/15foster.html>

Yaroni, A., Wetts, R., Ross, T. (2010). *The academy: A program for older youth transitioning out of foster care*. Vera Institute of Justice: New York, NY.

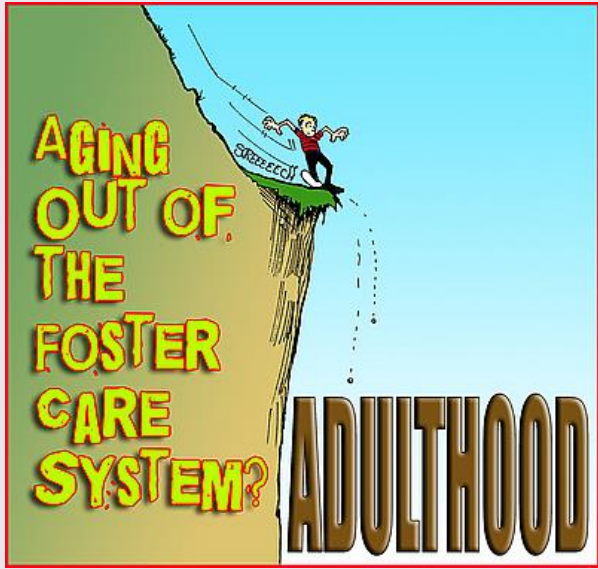
Scope of the Problem

- In 2015, Administration for Children's Services (ACS) reports 1,023 youth were discharged due to adoption and 2,527 were discharged due to reunification. This means about 7,500 youth are left to stay in the system until they age out
- Youth who age out of the system are subjected to high rates of homelessness, unemployment, incarceration and an impact on their education
- 2/3 of youth who age out of the system have lived in three different residences, 30% of which had lived in five or more, 24% have considered themselves to be homeless at one point, 28% had "couch-surfed" and half of the youth considered to be homeless have been so more than once
- 16% of males have been incarcerated since exiting the foster care system
- By 23 or 24, only one quarter of youth have their high school diploma or GED and only 6% have a two or four year degree
- 48% are unemployed

ACS. (2015). Data and Analysis. Retrieved April 23, 2016, from <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/data-analysis.page>

Yaroni, A., Wetts, R., Ross, T. (2010). *The academy: A program for older youth transitioning out of foster care*. Vera Institute of Justice: New York, NY.

Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Lee, J., Raap, M. (2010). *The Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Ages 23 and 24: Executive Summary*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall, University of Chicago. Retrieved From; http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest_Study_ES_Age_23_24.pdf



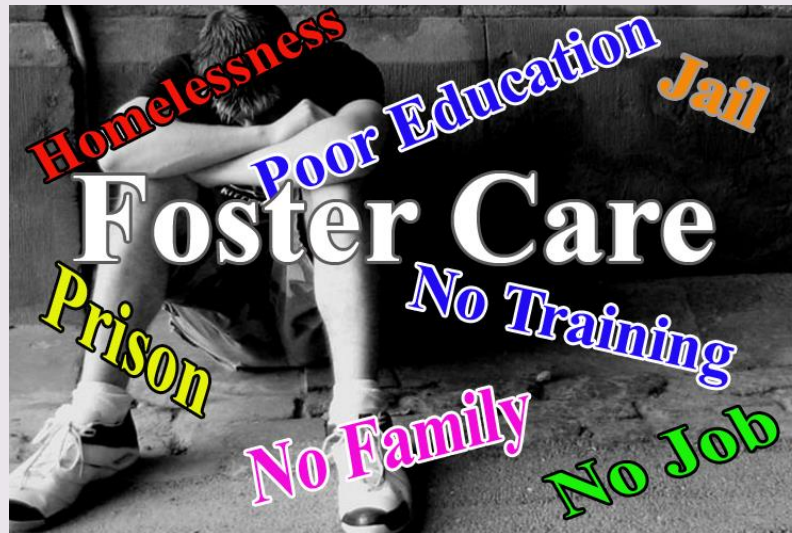
Scope of the Problem

- Only one quarter of foster youth felt that they were prepared to be self-sufficient and independent when they aged out of the foster care system
- Over one third of these youth wish they had been more prepared by receiving some training or assistance before leaving the foster care system
- $\frac{3}{4}$ reported having an income, but the median earnings are just \$8,000
- 70% of women and 29% of men who exited the system were receiving benefits from one or more government programs

Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Lee, J., Raap, M. (2010). The Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Ages 23 and 24: Executive Summary. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall, University of Chicago. Retrieved From; http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest_Study_ES_Age_23_24.pdf

Impact on Children

- Youth who age out of the system do not receive too much, if any, transitional means
- They are at risk for homelessness, unemployment and not being able to live independently since many of them are still receiving government benefits
- Youth who age out of the system take longer to adapt to the “real world” and survive on their own



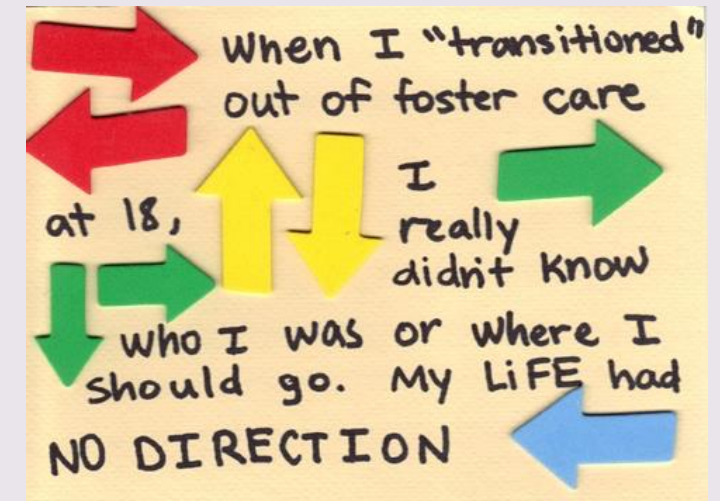
Responding to the Problem

- Since hearing about these unsettling statistics, Mayor De Blasio passed a bill in which NYC follows up and evaluates what happens to young adults, once they age out of the system
- This bill requires ACS quarterly reports on young adults who age out of the system, including high school graduation rates, age which the child left the foster care system, number of children with original birth certificates, driver's licenses and other documents, and the number of young adults who received housing assistance
- This is a good start, but it does not provide help to the youth who are struggling after leaving the foster care system

Bosman, J. (2010). City is Urged to Evaluate Foster Care. Retrieved April 23, 2016, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/15/nyregion/15foster.html>

Responding to the Problem

- One way the government attempted to solve these problems was to raise the age in which youth age out of the foster care system
- 18 states and the District of Columbia have extended the length of time youth stay in the foster care system
- They raised the age from 18 to 21 to give the youth more time to become self-sufficient and establish themselves
- This has, in turn, helped these youth steer clear of homelessness, but it still does not teach them the skills that are needed to live on their own appropriately
- The Family Unification Program (FUP) voucher system allows youth who are aging out of the system (as well as other people not involved with the foster care system) with a housing voucher and supportive services for 18 months
- Even with this program, youth only account for 14% of the FUP participants since they are not the only ones using this system



Mitchell, M. (2014, June 2). HUD Report Explores Options for Youth Aging out of Foster Care. Retrieved May 21, 2016, from <http://www.endhomelessness.org/blog/entry/hud-report-explores-options-for-youth-aging-out-of-foster-care#.V0Cqr2Mdd-U>

Policy Proposal

- Youth should be given the opportunity to have transitional housing and services in which they learn necessary life skills (educational skills, money management, vocational services, etc.) before they age out of the system
- This program should be available to all youth who exit the foster care system
- Completion of the program should include passing tests of the necessary life skills to ensure they are able and ready to live on their own without government assistance



Policy Proposal

- This policy would be open to only youth aging out of the foster care system, so there is no competition (unlike FUP vouchers) among the whole population
- This policy would also have a mandatory passing rate so the youth are guaranteed to learn about necessary life skills needed to lead an independent and successful life
- Completion process can be up to three years as opposed to only eighteen months so the youth do not feel the pressure of having to leave and learn everything necessary in such a fast matter
- The well-being of the youth will ultimately increase as the unemployment, homelessness and incarceration rates decrease when they receive the supported services required to be successful and independent

Policy Proposal Pros and Cons

Pros

- Supportive services guaranteed to youth aging out of foster care
- Secure transitional housing in place (not competing against other people)
- Youth will feel more ready and willing to live their lives more independently

Cons

- Needs government funding
- Could be controversial with people who are unaware of the unsettling statistics
- Fear of youth “going through the motions” and not retaining the skills being taught

Conclusions

- All in all, the unemployment, homelessness and incarceration rates are too high for youth who age out of the system. They deserve their best shot at life once they exit the foster care system
- By implementing this policy, it will ensure these youth will not be homeless, teach them necessary life skills, and have them ready to be independent and live on their own

References

- ACS. (2015). Data and Analysis. Retrieved April 23, 2016, from <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/data-analysis.page>
- Bosman, J. (2010). City is Urged to Evaluate Foster Care. Retrieved April 23, 2016, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/15/nyregion/15foster.html>
- Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Lee, J., Raap, M. (2010). The Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Ages 23 and 24: Executive Summary. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall, University of Chicago. Retrieved From; http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest_Study_ES_Age_23_24.pdf
- Mitchell, M. (2014, June 2). HUD Report Explores Options for Youth Aging out of Foster Care. Retrieved May 21, 2016, from <http://www.endhomelessness.org/blog/entry/hud-report-explores-options-for-youth-aging-out-of-foster-care#.V0Cqr2Mdd-U>
- Yaroni, A., Wetts, R., Ross, T. (2010). *The academy: A program for older youth transitioning out of foster care*. Vera Institute of Justice: New York, NY.