Youth who exit foster care to adulthood never having gained permanency through adoption, guardianship, or reunification are considered to have “aged out” of foster care. Without stable connections to parents, family members, or other caring adults, youth aging out of care are often left to negotiate the transition to adulthood with few supports. As a group, youth who age out of foster care fair poorly across a wide spectrum of outcome measures, including employment, educational attainment, access to health care, housing stability, and criminal justice system involvement when compared to the general population.

Nationally, growing numbers of young adults rely on their parents for material and emotional support well beyond their 18th birthday and many live with their parents while enrolled in school or working. Without permanent families to meet these needs, youth who have aged out of foster care may return to their birth families, many of whom are not prepared or able to provide this support. Research shows that youth who have tangible resources (e.g., money, household items, driver’s license, etc.) when they leave foster care have better employment and economic outcomes.

As of July 1, 2007, youth in Rhode Island age out of the foster care system at age 18, a change from age 21 in previous years. Youth with serious emotional disturbances, autism, or functional developmental disabilities continue to have their cases managed by the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) and remain legally entitled to services until age 21.

Between FFY 2007 and FFY 2011, there were 687 Rhode Island youth who aged out of foster care never having gained permanency. This was a 59% increase from the previous five year period, when 432 youth aged out of care.

Research suggests that allowing youth to remain in foster care until age 21 is associated with increased post-secondary educational attainment and higher lifetime earnings.
Enhance efforts to find permanent families for youth in foster care.

Expand supports for youth who have aged out of care to ensure that no youth ages out of DCYF care without achieving permanency.

Identify permanent supportive adult relationships.

Promote their successful transition to adulthood by expanding access to case management services, financial and housing assistance, and post-secondary educational and training opportunities.

Sources: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families; Rhode Island Foster Parents Association (RIFPA).

Note: The YESS and ASPIRE Programs are part of Consolidated Youth Services (CYS), which are led by RIFPA in collaboration with the Rhode Island Council of Resource Providers. CYS provides other supportive services to older youth in foster care and youth who have aged out of foster care that are not listed in the above chart.

Recommendations:

Reduce the numbers of youth who leave foster care without achieving permanency.

- Enhance efforts to find permanent families for youth in foster care by ensuring that all child welfare professionals, members of the judiciary, and foster/adoptive parents are provided initial and ongoing training to better understand and work towards timely permanency. This includes appropriately using concurrent planning methods to ensure that if reunification is not possible, children and youth can be more quickly placed in permanent families.

Enhance supports for youth who age out of foster care.

- Ensure that no youth ages out of DCYF care without the identification of permanent supportive adult relationships.

- Expand supports for youth who have aged out of care to promote their successful transition to adulthood by expanding access to case management services, financial and housing assistance, and post-secondary educational and training opportunities.

References:


5 Safety, permanency, and well-being in Rhode Island: Child welfare outcomes annual reports for FY 2002-2011. (n.d.). New Haven, CT: Prepared by the Consultation Center, Yale University School of Medicine for the Data Analytic Center of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families.


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