

The Rhode Island Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

TWO YEARS
of PROGRESS

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative is a national effort to help youth in foster care make successful transitions to adulthood. The mission of the Initiative is to “ensure that youth aging out of foster care will have increased opportunities for successful transition to self-sufficiency.”

The Rhode Island Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (RI JCYOI) is managed by Casey Family Services and functions statewide to improve the lives of older youth in the care of the Department of Children, Youth and Families. A core group of working partners helps RI JCYOI to be a productive and sustained effort. The goal of RI JCYOI is to enroll 225 youth over a three year period in the Opportunity Passport™ Program and to improve statewide systems and policies that impact all youth in the foster care system.

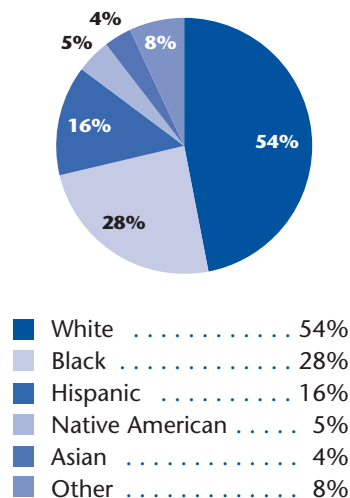
The Initiative was formed and funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Casey Family Programs.

Who are the Youth that Participate in the RI JCYOI?

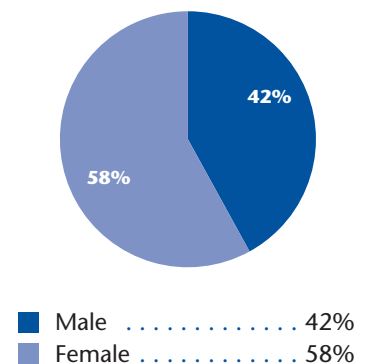
To participate in the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (JCYOI) program you must be between the ages of 14 and 23 and currently or formerly in foster care. In the first two years, 131 youth were officially enrolled in the RI JCYOI. The average age of participants in RI JCYOI in the first two years was 19 years old.

Of the 131 youth enrolled in the program, 81 youth are in high school or working towards their GED and another 25 youth are currently enrolled in college. More than 2 in 5 (42%) of the 131 participants are working.

RI JCYOI Participants by Race and Ethnicity



RI JCYOI Participants by Gender



What is the Opportunity Passport™ Program?

The Opportunity Passport™ is the centerpiece of RI JCYOI’s work. The goals of the Opportunity Passport™ are to help youth leaving foster care become more financially literate, gain experience with the banking system, and accumulate assets for housing, transportation, education/vocation and a few other specific assets.

The Opportunity Passport™ has three key components that drive its success:

IDA* Account – A matched savings account to be used for asset building – RI JCYOI will match dollar for dollar, up to \$1,000 for a specific asset.

Debit Account – A bank account to be used for short term expenses, such as utility payments, groceries and other daily living expenses.

“Door Openers” – Opportunities created for young people on the local level within their communities that provide access to education, housing, health care, asset building and transportation.

* IDA is an Individual Development Account

What Have the Youth Accomplished in the First Two Years of the RI JCYOI?

In the first two years of the RI JCYOI, 164 young people in foster care have completed the Financial Literacy Training Program. Of these 164 youth, 131 have opened up IDA accounts and are officially participating in the program. An additional 15 youth are working to fix past debt mistakes with the bank so that they can open an IDA account.

In the first two years, 38 youth have used a total of \$63,468 in matched savings to purchase 51 assets, including: 23 related to transportation, 11 for investments, 8 towards education and training costs, 8 for housing and 1 to establish a micro-enterprise.

RI JCYOI Governance



Youth 2 Youth Collaborative (Y2YC)

The youth board was created in the fall of 2004 with 8 members and has grown to include a membership totaling 12 participants. The mission of the

board "is to take into account the needs of youth in state care by reaching out with a youth to youth approach to establish programs which empower, educate and promote financial awareness." Board activities include: skill building, leadership development, advocacy, trainings and presentations to the community and to youth, and hosting fun activities for Opportunity Passport™ participants (e.g. movie night, life book/memory book, bake sale, etc.). The youth board is also responsible for disseminating up to \$10,000 to RI JCYOI participants in the form of small grants.

Community Partnership Board

The Community Partnership Board includes numerous service providers working with foster youth, employers, and members from the business community such as banking, housing, real estate, insurance, auto sales and maintenance. The working partners*, who help to do the work of RI JCYOI on a day-to-day basis, are also members of the Community Partnership Board.

Planning for the Future

RI JCYOI believes that using data to evaluate our program will help us to improve outcomes for youth. Our data show that while we are having success with youth enrolled in the RI JCYOI program, there is still work to be done to help youth be able to make successful transitions into adulthood.

For example, data indicated that 68% of youth participants reported that there was no adult in the community that they could go to for support. As a result, the Community Partnership Board approved the use of discretionary funds to help seed the start of the *Real Connections* program. The goal of the *Real Connections* program is to ensure that all youth leave state care with positive, permanent adult connections and options for a successful future.

Real Connections works with youth ages 12-21 who are in danger of aging out of the system without positive, permanent adult supports in place. The program identifies adults from a youth's existing network or from the community that have the potential to become lifelong supports and engages them in a mentoring relationship. In the first 6 months of piloting this program, *Real Connections* has paired 7 teens in care one-on-one with adult mentors and an additional 7 matches are pending. Trainings for additional mentors continue, with 10 mentors currently in training, who will then be matched with youth.



* Working Partners include: Casey Family Services, The Rhode Island Foster Parents Association, The Rhode Island Council of Resource Providers for Children, Youth and Families, Inc. (RICORP), Work Opportunities Unlimited, Westbay Collaborative, AS220, The Department of Children, Youth and Families, and Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

For more information on the Rhode Island Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative contact **Lori Nelson, Casey Family Services** at lnelson@caseyfamilyservices.org or **401.781.3669**.