

CHILD WELFARE FACT SHEET

May 2014

FOCUS ON RESTORING FOSTER CARE TO AGE 21

A growing number of states have extended foster care services beyond age 18, a policy that can have substantial individual, societal and economic benefits.^{1,2,3} 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.⁴ Often lacking stable connections to parents, family members, or other caring adults, youth aging out of foster care are often left to negotiate the transition to adulthood with few supports.⁵

Evidence from several studies suggests that the benefits of extending foster care to age 21 outweigh the costs to states.^{6,7,8} Extending foster care services beyond age 18 can result in:

■ **Increased Educational Attainment:** Youth who remain in foster care until age 21 are more likely to graduate high school or complete their GED and more likely to pursue post-secondary education than foster youth who are discharged from foster care at age 18.^{9,10}

■ **Higher Earnings:** Youth who remain in foster care until age 21 have higher lifetime earnings than those who age out at age 18. The University of Chicago's Chapin Hall estimates that extending foster care to age 21 increases per-person lifetime earnings for former foster youth by an average of \$72,000, largely due to increased educational attainment.^{11,12}

■ **Decreased Utilization of Public Assistance:** Youth who remain in foster care until age 21 utilize fewer public assistance programs than youth who age out of care at age 18. These programs can include Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Social Security Income (SSI), and Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF).^{13,14}

■ **Reduced Rate of Criminal Justice Involvement:** An estimated 30% to 40% of former foster youth are arrested within a few years of leaving care. Extending foster care to age 21 can lead to fewer arrests and lower incarceration rates, resulting in lower costs for police departments, correctional facilities, probation and parole departments, and victims of crime as well as improved employment prospects for former foster youth.^{15,16}

RHODE ISLAND YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

■ Rhode Island provided foster care services until age 21 until July 1, 2007, when the upper age limit that youth could remain in foster care was lowered to age 18. (Youth with serious emotional disturbances, autism, or functional developmental disabilities continue remain legally entitled to services until age 21).¹⁷ Since then, youth aging out have been able to access some aftercare services through the Young Adults Establishing Self-Sufficiency (YESS) program. While YESS offers important and effective supports for participating youth, youth would be eligible for more services if the age was restored to age 21.

■ If the upper age limit for foster care services was returned to 21, an estimated 348 Rhode Island youth ages 18 to 21 would be eligible for services. (This estimate does not include youth in the juvenile justice system, who can remain under Family Court jurisdiction and receive services until age 19.)^{18,19}

The *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections Act)* provides federal support to states who invest in extending foster care to age 21. Prior to this provision, which went into effect on October 1, 2010, federal foster care reimbursement (through Title IV-E of the federal Social Security Act) was limited to youth under age 18.²⁰

As of 2013, 21 states had taken advantage of this provision and several others were in the process of developing IV-E plans that include extended foster care. Additionally, some states have extended foster care beyond age 18 without using Title IV-E funds, including Delaware, Vermont, and Florida.²¹

To be eligible for federal reimbursement under the *Fostering Connections Act*, the youth must meet at least one of the following conditions:

- Completing secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential
- Enrolled in an institution that provides postsecondary or vocational education
- Participating in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment
- Employed for at least 80 hours per month
- Incapable of doing any of the activities described above due to a medical condition.²²

Recommendations:

- Restore foster care services to age 21 in Rhode Island, allowing any foster youth who meets one of the five eligibility conditions specified in the *Fostering Connections Act* to remain legally entitled to services through the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) until age 21.
- Ensure that DCYF has the financial resources to provide older foster youth with access to the full array of services offered to foster children under age 18, including case management, permanency supports, educational and vocational services, physical/mental health care, and a range of placement and housing options. Ensure that services for older foster youth are developmentally appropriate and tailored to meet the needs of an emerging adult population.
- Ensure that the Rhode Island Family Court has continued oversight of foster youth until age 21 so that the court may ensure that older youth receive supports and services to help them move towards independence, based on their transition plan.

References:

¹ Cooper, H, Jordan, E. & McCoy-Roth, M. (2013). Older youth and the Fostering Connections Act. In *Perspectives on Fostering Connections: A series of white papers on the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (30-35)*. The FosteringConnections.org Project.

² Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. (n.d.). *Success beyond 18: Frequently asked questions*. Retrieved April 21, 2014, from www.jimcaseyyouth.org

^{3,6,10,12,14} Peters, C. M., Dworsky, A., Courtney, M. E. & Pollack, H. (2009). *Extending foster care to age 21: Weighing the costs to government against the benefits to youth*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

⁴ Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A., Lee, J. & Rapp, M. (2010). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 23 and 24*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

^{5,7,16} *Cost avoidance: The business case for investing in youth aging out of foster care*. (2013). St. Louis, MO: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.

^{8,9,11,13,15} *Extending foster care to age 21: Measuring costs and benefits in Washington State*. (2010). Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

¹⁷ *Services to youth ages 18-21: Q and A*. (2007). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families.

¹⁸ Rhode Island General Laws, Section 14-1-6.

¹⁹ Rhode Island KIDS COUNT analysis of data from the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families.

^{20,22} *A guide to support the implementation of foster care beyond age 18: Questions & answers, summary of federal Fostering Connections guidance and perspectives from the field*. (2014). St. Louis, MO: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Success Beyond 18.

²¹ Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. (n.d.). *Success beyond 18: Progress in the states*. Retrieved April 21, 2014, from www.jimcaseyyouth.org



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