

Youth aging out of foster care essay sample

[Life](#), [Adolescence](#)



Introduction

Across the country, on an annual basis, varied aged youth are disposed into foster care for a variety of reasons such as uncontrolled behaviors, parental/caretaker abuse, neglect and/or substance dependence of a parent/caretaker. Intended to be impermanent, arrangements [foster care placement] are with an understanding of the primary goal being that of reunification with the parent/caretaker in the majority cases. Contrariwise, an ever-increasing percentage of youth entering the foster care system are unable to succeed in reunifying with their parent/caretaker.

Due to the inability to reunify, the youth's reside within the foster care system until age eighteen at which point they [the youth] "age out" of the foster care system. Upon discharge, the youth are typically unprepared to navigate through their lives successfully. Most lack education, housing, medical insurance, and are deficient in adaptive skills (self-direction), functional academics for everyday life, social skills, persistent mental illness, substance abuse disorders and an extensive involvement in the criminal justice system translating into, among other issues, unemployment/underemployment, unstable housing, imprisonment, and various mental health and medical illnesses that can progress unaddressed.

Field Setting

CBH collaborates with the Division of Social Services (DSS) where each youth receives Medical Assistance [health coverage], while CBH covers the behavioral health portion of treatment for those youth who have a need. Behavioral health issues have an increased risk due to multiple placements

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within the foster care system. Clinical Care Managers at CBH oversee the discharge planning process in collaboration with providers such as Department of Human Services (DHS) where the youth is in surrogate placement.

Population Served

The served population are the youth committed to oversight by the Philadelphia Department of Human Services, who are in substitute care placements throughout the state of Pennsylvania, and receiving behavioral health services with Community Behavioral Health (CBH). The youth are in the discharge planning process resulting from the youth reaching the “aged out” juncture with DHS. As youth reach, the aged out point, the youth will no longer receive any type of medical or behavioral coverage, which includes CBH. Because CBH commits itself to helping people live in the community as well as helping people live with the community, it tasks master level social workers [CBH] to participate in the discharge plan of the identified youth. This process, a transition plan, helps to ensure the youth a range of supports as the transition occurs, from child welfare (DSS and CBH) and into an identified adult medical and mental health system along with other acknowledged areas needing support. Summary of Article #1-

Transition to Adulthood for Vulnerable Youths: A Review of Research and Implications for Policy

The article Transition to Adulthood for Vulnerable Youths: A review of Research and Implications for Policy begins with a brief explanation of the

effects of youth who have “...spent large parts of their lives in substitute care...generally experience multiple problems...” It [the article] notes specifics such as “ Less attention...paid to issues related to aging out of care and supervised independent living programs for adolescents in the child welfare system.” The editorial examines the “ History of Independent Living Policy” notating changes in public law that include the “ 1985...Independent Living Initiative...amended Title IV-E...Social Security Act to provide federal funds to states to...develop independent living skills.” Additional changes in law discussed involves “...the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993...” where “ The Independent Living Program was reauthorized indefinitely...” to the “ Foster Care Independence Act of 1999... to provide states with more funding and greater flexibility to carry out programs designed to help children make the transition...to self-sufficiency.”

Previous Research on Adolescents Leaving Care analyzes “...research studies on substitute care outcomes...” pointing to a study by “...Trudy Festinger (1983)... a comprehensive follow-up on young adults who left foster care in the New York metropolitan area.” The study showed “...one-third...had not completed high school... and that 21% were receiving public assistance” “ Richard Barth (1990) used nonrandom methods to...interview 55 young adults in the San Francisco area who left foster care at least 1 year earlier.” “...more than half reported they had...money troubles (53%), 38 % had not graduated from high school, more than half (56%) had used street drugs since leaving care, 39% reported...they had problems with housing... approximately one-third had been involved in criminal activity. The article included a “ national study conducted by Westat, Inc. (1991)...of the National

Evaluation of Title IV-E Independent Living Programs for Youth in Foster Care...reported by Ronna Cook (1994)."

This study utilized "...a multistage (state, county clusters, youth) stratified probability sample." It "...identified 1, 644 adolescents discharged from foster care between January 1987 and July 1988." "...844 were located ...in summary...status after discharge is described as only adequate at best."

There are "several limitations to the program" identified with a given example of "...few programs provide apprenticeships or affordable vocation programs and connections to potential employers..." Daily living skills "...are classroom-based activities; hands on activities to practice the skills are rare."

The article begins to conclude discussing using "A theoretical base for independent living policy..." using the "Ecological theory", "Resiliency frameworks", and "coping and social supports" It [the article] points out "More explicit attention to the theoretical underpinnings of the intervention is needed."

Summary of Article #2- Early outcomes for young adults transitioning from out-of-home care in the USA

Early outcomes for young adults transitioning from out-of-home care in the USA is repetitive of the previous summarized article in that it points to youth experiencing "...significant difficulties during...transition to adulthood." "Too many...neither employed nor in school, have children...persistent mental illness or substance use disorders...without basic necessities...homeless...involved with criminal justice system." "Nor can they...count on the state for continuing support once...discharged from care."

The article elaborates giving additional details on specifics such as “...federal funding did not keep pace with the growing number of foster youth...” and how the “ Foster Independence Act if 1999...replaced the Independent Living Program with...John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program...doubled maximum states could draw...to 140 million.

“ The Midwest study is a longitudinal study...following youth in the states of Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin as they “ age out” of the child welfare system and transition to adulthood.” “ Wave one...Data...collected between May 2002 and March 2003...from 732 youth...17 or 18...still under...the state child welfare agency.” It [the Midwest Study] “ focused on...experiences... while in care. “...the second wave...between March and December 2004 from 82% of the 732 adults...interviewed.” It “...focused on young adults’ experiences since the first interview...included questions about their lives after leaving care.”

Effects of aging out of system paralleled throughout the paper consistent with the above first peer reviewed article. The themed emergent is that has become apparent is “...young adults...are doing worse...” and those who “ chose to remain under the care...of the child welfare system experienced better outcomes. The article gave some promising percentages of outcomes in various areas including “ employment and earning” “...where it pointed to a vast majority (92. 2%) of...young adults...reported they had a job at some point in time” It [the article] is noted, “ What was ...striking about the employment is...how little they earned during the past year. “...nearly half 48. 5% females...and 24. 5% males received one or more government

benefits since the first interview.” “...young adults no longer in care...more likely...received these forms of government assistance...” such Food Stamps, SSI, and general assistance payments.

The editorial concludes with the “...states represented in the Midwest Study are faring worse across a number of domains of functioning than their same-age peers, in some cases much worse.” Strengths were notes such as “...some...are moving through college...others have stable employment and living situation.”

Conclusion –

Implications for field placement

Youth are consistently aging out of the DHS /CBH systems and most without identifiable supports and services. In present day 2013, the issue still looms as dire and urgent. During my field placement, one assignment was to research how different states were addressing transitional age youth and young adult supports and services as opposed to Pennsylvania and the city of Philadelphia. My field placement supervisor, Laura DeRiggi is the Group Leader on the special project.

My research lead me to alarming statistics of transitioning youth out of the child welfare system [foster care] all across the nation as well as here in my own city, that I was oblivious to. In Philadelphia [the city of brotherly love (and sisterly affection)], there are hundreds of youth who have transitioned out of the foster care system who are now counted into the homeless population who are scrounging to live daily. These youth are living on the

streets of center city's LOVE Park, one of Philadelphia's most iconic landmarks, without ever having a fighting chance to begin their lives in the appropriate manner and most times through no fault of their own.

What is equally disturbing and shocking is that the same scenarios are repetitiously happening in cities and towns across the country in present day 2013, here in this wonderful country of opportunities and liberties. A social workers duty is to "...enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty." I want to do everything possible to "enhance the wellbeing" of these youth transition seamlessly; this undertaking I found through my work as an intern at Community Behavioral Health. Areas of future research

There are several areas identified as priority for organized research, such as securing sustained federal funding dollars committed to conducting the needed research, which includes evaluating the services provided to youth who have transitioned, identifying systems needed to improve the outcomes of those transitioned youth. Organizational studies on the foster care system and relationships between foster care services and other systems involved as it relates to improving transitional outcomes for the youth. Examination and study of the decision making process and reoccurring organizational issues within the foster care systems. Exploration of race and ethnicity as a determinate on outcomes of care for the transitioned youth.

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