

Youth aging out of the foster care system

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Youth have the option to leave care at 16 if they take it to court and get the higher authorities permission. Most youth in care stick around until they are 18. This is the age foster parents and other residential centres are no longer responsible for youth. The youth is then forced to find a home, job and complete their education by their selves.

They are provided with a small sum of one from C. A. S (Children's Aid society) until they are 21. This usually results in an unsuccessful adulthood because of the following; youth living at home with their parents have the extended supports that youth in care do not, foster youth lack the skills that are needed in order to achieve success in the transition into adulthood, and finally youth in care bare the scars of emotional trauma and thus are more likely to become pregnant, involved with crime, or experiment with drugs and alcohol. Therefore, youth in care face greater difficulty transitioning into adulthood than compared to general youth. There are many benefits for living at home while transitioning into adulthood.

First, other youth continue to live with their parents until around the age of 25 and are therefore generating financial support from their loved ones. Youth in care are given the option for Extended Care and Maintenance agreements which will provide the youth with 500\$ a month (source: Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services). This is not nearly enough to be able to survive. Even welfare is higher at 626\$ for one person (source: Region of Peel). Next, when youth go through difficult obstacles they can depend on their parents to be their ' safety net".

“ We try out jobs, apartments, and relationships, and when they do not work out, we can retreat to the emotional and financial support of our parents.”- (From foster care to adulthood by Emily Buss), Youth in foster care do not have parents to rely on when faced with difficult situations. For example: if a general youth is evicted from their apartment they have the option to go to their parents for the temporary financial and emotional support needed. If a former youth from care is evicted from their apartment they are faced with homelessness and usually will not have a place to go. Finally, foster youth face stress from emotional family disconnect.

They do not have the healthy family relationships and bonds to support them throughout adulthood. All youth need for parents/ guardians to be involved in the young adult's life in order to achieve a successful adulthood. Adults serve as a role model for all youth as they grow up and strive for their goals to be successful. Without parents it is very hard to find a continuous adult role model in one's life. Therefore, there are greater difficulties youth in care face than compared to youth living with parents. Youth transitioning into adulthood needs important life skills in order to succeed; youth in care often do not have the advantage of learning these skills.

First, youth in care need more resources in helping them become more independent. They are dependent on C. A. S for everything from school to personal things. Youth in care have next to no opinion in what goes on with their lives. Appointments are made for them, their days are scheduled so they are given no freedom, and they are told what to do-when and where.

Independence is needed to go and face the world on their own; they have to deal with finances and prioritize their time. Without C. A. S telling them what to do, they are doomed for failure. “ Turning 18 doesn’t magically make me independent.

“- (“ Where do we go from here?” youth aging out of care special report: by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (Alberta).) Next, due to the fact that they lack independence and have not experiences freedom, they therefore do not have street smarts. For example: a youth living in a foster home would not be given the opportunity to go to a party and drink alcohol. They would not know how to control themselves in this situation and could not relate to past experiences as they do not have any. When they turn 18 they are given the freedom to do whatever they like. They may go to a party and drink and not make good decisions because they have not experienced this before.

This will result in a poor life style and C. A. S is no longer there to help them back on their feet. (I would like to state that I am focusing on foster youth in this report. Youth in group homes are given too many opportunities and experiences in their environment so this point does not affect the group home youth.

). Finally, foster youth lack skills in managing their money. Throughout their lives everything has been paid for them; health expenses, clothing allowances, food and hygiene, etc. They have only had to deal with how much candy they can get with their 10\$ allowance. When given the responsibility to manage their money and create budgets by prioritizing

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needs from wants, they have to education on the subject. This leads to poverty, homeless, and illness.

For example: dental expenses and medications had always been previously paid for my C. A. S. Now the foster youth is forced to pay for these necessary expenses with the small amount of money they receive. Over 46% of youth in care are on prescription drugs for mental health related reasons.

(Source: Portrait of Youth after Leaving Care by Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth). After leaving care money is a problem for these young adults, so how are they supposed to pay for their drugs?

Without their drugs they would not be functioning individuals and therefore would undergo many obstacles. Therefore, improving the skills obtained during the time that youth spend in care can increase their chances of success after aging out of the system. Foster youth suffer from childhood traumas that result in unintelligent choices later in their young adult life.

First, young women in foster care are more than twice as likely as their peers not in foster care to become pregnant by age 19.

(Source: Teen pregnancy among young women in foster care, by Heather D. Boonstra). There is evidence that foster youth will have sex at younger age than compared to general youth. Many youth in foster care have a child at an early age to create the family they never had. Being in foster care, they are never permanently with one family.

They are always moving from home to home and never had the idealistic family; this scars them emotional and increases the desire for a family no matter the circumstances. Being pregnant at a young age is not good for any
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teenager. There is a risk for the young teenage mom to drop out of school and end up lacking the skills needed to achieve employment and a stable adulthood. Next, foster youth are more likely to be involved with the criminal justice system compared to youth in the general population. (Source: The Future of children).

Foster youth may struggle from attachment disorder after being removed from their parents. This leads to behavioral issues and many placement moves. Over time the behavior is suggested to carry on becoming worse and leading to criminal activity. "...children placed in foster care have arrest, conviction, and imprisonment rates as adults that are three times higher than those of children who remained at home."-(Child Protection and Adult Crime, by Joseph J.

Doyle Jr.) It is obvious that being involved with criminal activity is a poor lifestyle to have if one wants to achieve success. Finally, many youth who experience the foster care system struggle with substance use and abuse. There are several factors behind the cause of this. A reoccurring relation is the youth's parents' also struggling with substance use and abuse. Another reoccurring theme is that foster youth generally have mental illnesses such as Posttraumatic Stress disorder and Conduct Disorder.

In these emotional states one may turn to drug use as a way to cope with stress. Foster youth face both stress and peer pressure to experiment with drugs and are more likely to abuse. " Foster youth exhibit higher rates of illegal drug use than youth who have never been in foster care (34% vs.

22%)."- (Preventing Substance Abuse among Youth in Foster Care by Belinda Basca and Dustianne North.

) Drug use leads to criminal activity, poor relationships and motivation, poor health, and it is a very expensive habit to keep up with. This will clearly lead to an unsuccessful transition to adulthood. Therefore, foster youth have gone through extreme situations that scar them and lead to mental illnesses creating boundaries to a successful adulthood and leading to a path of poverty, homelessness, or even death. In conclusion, youth in care face greater difficulty transitioning into adulthood than compared to general youth. Throughout my research I've found three themes in leading youth into a successful adulthood; youth need strong relationships with adults in their community, youth need more resources in helping them become more independent, and youth need more access to supporting services .

In having strong relationships with adults in their community, youth can have someone to look up to and someone to help get them back on their feet. By becoming more independent youth will understand the concept of being an adult and will be able to undergo the challenges ahead. Foster youth suffer from many past emotional events making stress a difficult thing to cope with. In providing more services and making youth more aware of these services, we can improve their stragities and guarantee them a positive future. Therefore, changes and adjustments will have to made in order for the aging out of foster care population to be more likely to live a successful adulthood.