

youthwork INFORMATION BRIEF



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Foster Youth

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LearningWork Connection

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Marnie never knew her father and was abandoned by her mother when she was 7. Her grandparents raised her for a few years but eventually decided to put her in foster care. For six years she was shunted from home to home, often neglected, and sometimes abused. One day, Marnie saw a poster for the local One-Stop and thought, "That's what I need!" She marched into the One-Stop, met Ms. Baldwin, explained her situation, and asked for help. Ms. Baldwin had only been on the job for three weeks, and Marnie was the first foster youth she had talked to. What does Ms. Baldwin need to know about foster youth?

Who Are Foster Youth?

Foster youth are those who have been removed from the care and custody of their biological parents by the juvenile court and placed in an out-of-home living situation. All foster youth, including those currently in foster care, those in the process of transitioning out of foster care, and former foster youth, are eligible for Workforce Investment Act (WIA) services.

The Needs of Foster Youth

Foster youth have many challenges and issues that are common to all low-income at-risk youth. In addition they lack the stability of a family, are frequent dropouts, are unaware of services available to them, and are less likely to make a successful transition to adult life. Foster youth leave the foster care system between age 18 and 24; when they leave the foster care system they lose the services it provides and often become homeless as well.

Foster Youth Issues	
Education issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High dropout rate• Lack of parental support and involvement
Social issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feelings of fear and loneliness• Victimization• Economic insecurity
Legal Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Runaways• Juvenile justice involvement

Those in foster care are already involved with public agencies. The key to providing them with the best services as they transition out of foster care is to **work with those agencies already serving them.** On their own,

youth simply may not know what other services are available to them and where to go to find help. Also, many of the agencies serving at-risk youth may be unaware of services available through WIA. Networking with other youth-serving groups and agencies and getting to the youth **before** they transition out of foster care are the best ways to help them.

Networking	
Agencies and Groups	Action Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child welfare, children services, foster care • Workforce investment board • Public education districts and schools • Private, charter, and alternative schools • Teachers association • Educational guidance association • Community colleges and 4-year colleges • Family and social services • Adult basic education • Juvenile justice including probation judges • Youth who have successfully transitioned out of foster care • Businesses, employer associations, and chambers of commerce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage and combine resources across all agencies. • Contact foster care agencies to identify foster youth. • Enroll before youth are ready to exit foster care. • Contact agencies and let them know about available youth services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Identify agencies. o Develop and share brochures and printed information about services. o Visit agencies. o Make presentations. • Formalize relationship between youth-serving agencies and WIA youth council. • Promote and establish foster parent groups. • Offer to work with child welfare agency to develop plan for foster youth

In addition to those strategies used with all high-risk youth, youth services workers need to look at additional ways that they can serve foster youth. Through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, the Foster Care Independence Act increases funds to states to assist youths in transition from foster care to independent living. Chafee Programs are administered by the states. Eligibility and support may vary from state to state. In addition, eligibility may vary for different Chafee Program components.

John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training in daily living skills, budgeting, locating and maintaining housing • Individual and group counseling • Written independent living plan based on an assessment of needs • Housing for older youth (18-21) • Medicaid assistance • Counseling • Additional support • Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs)

Working with all agencies dealing with all aspects of foster youth is an excellent way to begin to serve these youth most efficiently and effectively.

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