

## Improving Outcomes for Older Youth in Foster Care

In 2005, 24,408 youth in America left foster care without achieving a lifelong connection to a permanent family. Young people in this situation often face a bleak future:

- They are less likely than their peers in the general population to graduate from high school graduation or enter college or vocational/technical training.
- They are less likely to hold a job or make a living wage.
- They are more likely to become single parents early in life.
- They are more likely to suffer homelessness, mental illness, poor health care, and substance abuse.

Research indicates that continued support and guidance can improve the lives of thousands of young adults. In addition, evidence shows that young people who stay in foster care beyond age 18 leave care more ready to succeed.

In recent years, state and tribal child welfare systems have begun to recognize the urgent need to help young people find a permanent family. States and tribes have worked to improve independent living services and expand supportive housing options for youth aging out of foster care. Too often, however, these initiatives are not integrated. Federal policy can help support these initiatives and encourage states to integrate efforts to achieve permanence and instill independent living skills.

Casey Family Programs' white paper on older youth explores two important questions. Are the current policies the right policies for youth leaving foster care? And are these policies and practices meeting the needs of these youth? The recommended changes below would help older youth in foster care meet with greater success in preparing for adulthood.

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Support effective ways to place children with families, reduce the reliance on congregate care, and connect older youth with a permanent family. Casey supports the creation of a federally subsidized guardianship program and incentives to give older youth in foster care a range of options, such as reunification with their birth family, adoption, or guardianship.
2. Improve services to help young people prepare for adulthood. Older youth in foster care need early preparation to become ready for adult life in areas such as housing, accessing physical and mental health services, education, and employment. Casey supports funding for the Chafee Independent Living Program and the Education and Training Vouchers Program. We also support extending medical insurance coverage to at least age 21 for youth aging out of foster care.
3. Collect more up-to-date research and data about how youth who have aged out of foster care fare as adults. Casey believes there is an urgent need to evaluate transition services in order to help states invest in the most effective programs for this population.
4. In addition to the three specific recommendations on changes to federal policy to help youth in foster care find permanent homes and prepare for adulthood, tribes should have the option to administer IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance programs directly.

