

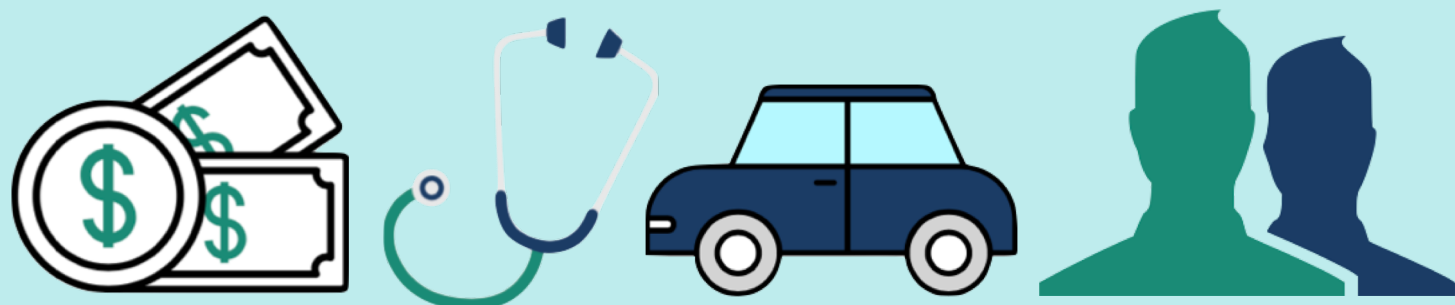
AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

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THE PROBLEM

The transition into adulthood is a daunting task, especially for former foster youth who are released to live independently at the age of 18. Most teens in the United States have family and support systems in place that they can turn to when they need help during their transition. Unfortunately, that is not the case for teenagers who age out of the foster care system.

After exiting the system, former foster youth must find housing, get a job, potentially enroll in college, learn how to pay bills and taxes, obtain health insurance, manage their funds, find means of transportation, form adult relationships, and do many other things all on their own.



CONSEQUENCES

Youth who age out of foster care have low rates of high school graduation. Only around 50 percent of foster youth earn a high school diploma (NFYI, 2017). The employment rates for individuals who were placed in foster care are 20 percent lower than those who were not in foster care (Okpych & Courtney, 2014). The lack of equitable access to employment opportunities and wages puts former foster youth at an increased risk for life-time adverse outcomes such as poverty and homelessness (Kim, 2019). For the population of individuals who have aged out of foster care, there are higher rates of substance abuse (Berzin, 2008), arrests, time spent in jail, and crime convictions (Barth, 1990; Reilly, 2003; Courtney et al., 2004) than the average U.S. population.

AFTER AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE AT THE AGE OF EIGHTEEN

FOSTER YOUTH HAD A LESS THAN 3% CHANCE OF EARNING A COLLEGE DEGREE



FOSTER YOUTH EARNED 50% LESS THAN THOSE WHO WERE NOT IN FOSTER CARE

20% OF FOSTER YOUTH BECAME INSTANTLY HOMELESS



4% OF FORMER FOSTER YOUTH ENTERED STATE PRISONS WITHIN 7 YEARS

(NFYI, 2017; Glasmeier & Nadeau, 2017; Havlicek, 2011; Needell et al., 2002)

POTENTIAL SOLUTION

EXTENDED FOSTER CARE

The federal government passed The Federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 which amended the Title IV-E program to give states the option to extend foster care to individuals after twenty-one. While this program was offered to every state, only twenty-five states have offered the extension (McCann, 2017). Research has been conducted in the states which chose to enact the extension, and the results show promising results.



(The Message, 2016)

EACH ADDITIONAL YEAR IN EXTENDED CARE...

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- the probability that youth completed a high school credential by about **8%**
- their expected probability of enrolling in college by **10-11%**
- the number of quarters that youth were employed between their 18th and 21st birthdays
- the amount of money youth had in their bank accounts by about **\$404**
- the odds that youth described a professional as a source of social support
(Courtney et al., 2018)

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- the amount of money youth received in need-based public food assistance by more than **\$700**
- the odds of experiencing economic hardship between the ages of 17 and 21 by about **12%**
- the odds of being homeless by **28%**
- the odds that youth became pregnant by **28%**
- the odds that youth had been arrested between the ages of 17 and 21 by **41%**
- the odds that youth had been convicted of a crime by **40%**
(Courtney et al., 2018)

CALL TO ACTION

Since extended care is not mandatory and each state gets to choose whether or not they want to offer it, there are children who are left at a disadvantage. The states that have chosen to offer extended foster care have more successful transitions among their foster youth. Since there has been success with this extension in many states, it should be offered in every state in order to give every child the same opportunity. Many foster teens do not yet have the necessary education, experience, or skill set to obtain a job, which puts them at high risk of poverty and homelessness, and then leads to an increased risk of crime and substance abuse. As society changes, it is imperative that foster youth be offered more time in the system in order to prepare to step out on their own.

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