



**YOUTH
TRANSITIONING
2006 Community
Commitment Issue**

**YOUTH TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD
SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO SERVICES
AND SUPPORTS THAT ASSIST IN ACQUIRING
THE LIFE SKILLS AND EDUCATION
NECESSARY FOR INDEPENDENCE,
EMPLOYMENT AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY**

Youth who grow up in the child welfare system face significant challenges as they become "adults." Seldom have they been provided with the education or experiences needed to live independently. And they do not have the networks, mentors and contacts needed for a successful transition. Residential treatment and Juvenile Justice Programs provide little preparation for transitioning youth.

In 2005, according to HomeSafeNet, over 5,300 teens residing in Florida's foster care system were eligible for "Pre-Independent Living Services." Statewide, approximately, 800-1,000 teens turn 18 and "graduate" from the foster care system to legal adulthood each year. Currently, Florida's post-foster care programming serves only 28% of the youth who are eligible for those services.

The problem is magnified when one considers young adults exiting relative caregiver placements and juvenile justice facilities and programs. Many of these youth face the same challenges as youth exiting foster care - but they cannot access most transition programs. As of January 2005, state-wide, approximately 50% (or 14,776) of the 29,360 children under state supervision in out-of-home placements were kinship arrangements.

Transitioning youth with emotional, developmental and behavioral issues face even greater challenges. This population disproportionately fails to qualify for necessary services, and often do not receive the staff assistance necessary to help them obtain available services. Many become discouraged as they are placed on waiting lists even when eligible for much needed services.

The struggles of former foster youth attempting to achieve self-sufficiency are well documented. OPPAGA, for example, reports poor academic outcomes for former foster youth.¹⁰ These youth are less likely to graduate high school or attend any type of post-secondary program. In the employment arena, Florida's former foster youth earn four times less than non-foster youth. National research informs that when employed most employment situations are unsteady and 60% earn under \$10,000 per year.¹¹ Not surprisingly 41% reported not having enough money to cover basic needs,¹² 36% reported at least one homeless episode, 33% reported not having a place to live on their 18th birthday.¹³ Youth frequently leave foster care with nothing more than a garbage bag of clothes. Over 60 percent of the young women leaving care will have a baby within 4 years.¹⁴

The limited coordination and cooperation among the state's child-serving agencies plagues communities seeking to meet the needs of transitioning youth. The services that do exist may be impenetrable for young people newly on their own and are certainly an issue for youth with disabilities. Young adults and the communities that serve them have identified key areas of concern for this population to include affordable housing, transportation, health care, education, workforce development, life skills and engagement with mentors and communities in an empowering manner

¹⁰ Florida's Office of Program Policy and Government Accountability, *Report 05-61, December 2005A* found: fewer foster teens scored at grade level on the FCAT (Math 62% for non-foster teens and 22% for foster teens; Reading 38% for non-foster teens and 18% for foster teens); youth were more likely to be held back a grade; were more likely to change schools, (38% foster teens, 7% non-foster teens); were more likely to have disabilities that impeded learning.

¹¹ Reilly, T. (2003). *Transition From Care: Status and Outcomes of Youth Who Age Out of Foster Care*. Child Welfare, #6, November/December, 2003, 727-746.

¹² Ibid, 55% Reported no health insurance, even though 36% reported serious health problems.

¹³ Ibid, 50% reported having less than \$250 at time of discharge; 73% had no drivers license; 62% reported not having important documents (birth certificate, school records, etc.) and 72% reported not having the basic necessities to set up a household.

¹⁴ 1999 *Children's Legislative Agenda*, CWLA Press, 1999.