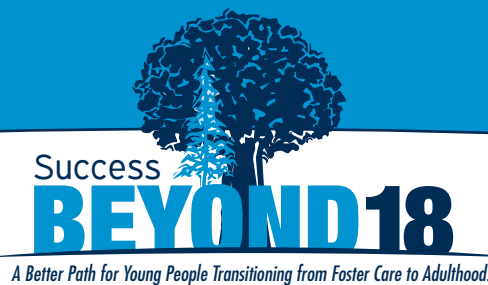


# *Success Beyond 18:*

A Better Path for Young People  
Transitioning from Foster Care to Adulthood

May 2013





## Success Beyond 18: A Better Path for Young People Transitioning from Foster Care to Adulthood

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*"I chose to remain in foster care when I turned 18. The agency provided me with the services and supports that I needed and engaged me in every step of the process. [My caseworker] helped me connect to important people in my life who would be there for me when I left care. I am very happy with the way things turned out for me and with the support that I got after I turned 18." — Josie Graham*

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Most young people in foster care do not have the positive experiences when they turn 18 in foster care that Josie is happy to have had. They typically leave foster care to make it on their own at an age when even most well-supported young people in intact families cannot succeed by themselves. But it doesn't have to be this way. More young people can have positive experiences like Josie. They don't need to face the prospect of turning 18 and being on their own.

The Jim Casey Initiative's **Success Beyond 18** is a national campaign to advance policies and practices designed to set young people transitioning from foster care on the right track for success in family, work, and adult life. The overarching objective of **Success Beyond 18** is to give young people in foster care the same building blocks for success in life and positive experiences that are more often associated with their peers in intact families. These building blocks include: the support of family, peers, and community; access to education, work and other community supports and services; opportunities to build resilience and the ability to assume adult roles; financial capability and assets; and direct involvement in making decisions that impact them – the hallmarks of the transition to independence and a productive and healthy adulthood. **Success Beyond 18** is built on the recognition that foster care can play a positive role in young people's lives, changing their life trajectories in positive and life-affirming ways. For foster care to be the positive force that young people need it to be, however, we must make better choices.

The mission of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative is to ensure that young people—primarily those between ages 14 and 25—make successful transitions from foster care to adulthood. The Jim Casey Initiative achieves this mission by working nationally, in states, and locally to improve policies and practices, promote youth engagement, apply evaluation and research, and create community partnerships. The Jim Casey Initiative's work creates opportunities for young people to achieve positive outcomes in permanence, education, employment, housing, health, financial capability, and social capital.

### The Need for Urgent Action

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (FCA) has provided critically needed opportunities for older youth in foster care to benefit from the extension of foster care beyond age 18 with federal support. It is essential that we act with a sense of urgency to take full advantage of those opportunities by designing and implementing services and supports for young people that meet their developmental needs as young adults. At age 18, now legally adults, young people in foster care face potentially dramatic life changes as their formal stays in care as "children" come to an end. Young people transition-



ing from foster care between the ages of 18 and 21 or older, like their peers in intact families, must have supports to become healthy, productive and resilient adults by age 25. Those supports must be grounded in a commitment that each young person who chooses to participate in extended care should have the benefit of a permanent family – the foundation for successful adulthood that has been missing in most services and supports beyond age 18. The efforts to connect young people to families must not cease at age 18.

At the same time, the FCA's extended care provisions serve as a catalyst for examining, redefining and improving services and supports beginning no later than age 14. Brain research shows that we have a second chance to help young people overcome adversity. It is during the early and middle adolescent years that young people's futures can be secured by ensuring that they have permanent and safe families, social support, and quality preparation for the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. Absent a design that specifically addresses the unique developmental needs of adolescents and emerging adults in care, we risk creating a new "cliff" at age 21, with young people only marginally better off and still lacking a family and the supportive social networks that are necessary as they face life's inevitable challenges.

Society stands to experience immediate cost savings when adolescents and young adults in foster care are prepared to gradually assume adult roles and care is extended beyond 18 for those young people who otherwise would age out of care and attempt to make it on their own. With these services and supports in place, more young people in care can be expected to graduate from high school, delay childbearing, and avoid involvement with the criminal justice system.<sup>1</sup> If youth transitioning from foster care graduated from high school at the rate of young people as a whole, an estimated 7,000 additional young people would leave care each year as high school graduates or well on their way; their annual wages would be \$8,500 more per year having graduated high school.<sup>2</sup> If young people transitioning from foster care became parents at the rate of their non-foster care peers, there would be 3,000 fewer births, saving society \$5,500 for each child through the first 15 years of life.<sup>3</sup> If young people transitioning from foster care were involved in the criminal justice system at the average rate for the population as a whole, 1,950 fewer young people would be annually involved in the "deep end" of the criminal justice sys-

tem, saving society \$2.5 million in arrest, incarceration, probation and parole costs.<sup>4</sup>

The status quo denies young people leaving foster care the support they need for a strong start at adulthood. *Success Beyond 18* will succeed in providing a better path by increasing public understanding of the unique needs of young people transitioning from foster care; mobilizing individuals to take action; and promoting policy and practice improvements.

## The *Success Beyond 18* Goals

The three policy and practice goals of *Success Beyond 18* provide a foundation for concrete action on the part of states, tribes and other jurisdictions in meeting the needs of young people in foster care beginning at age 14 and continuing until at least age 21. They provide a path to a transformed system of foster care services and supports intentionally designed to achieve positive outcomes for adolescents and young adults in care. These goals offer an integrated approach to providing young people in foster care with the benefits enjoyed by young people in healthy, intact families. The three goals respond to what young people have told us, what experience has taught us, and what science tells us. The three goals of *Success Beyond 18* are:

***Success Beyond 18 Goal 1.*** Extend care for young people beyond age 18 to at least 21 and do it right by ensuring services and supports are offered based on the unique developmental tasks of this life stage and their legal status as adults.

In today's society, there is no longer an expectation that young people – including those in foster care – will be on their own at age 18, ready to live "independently." Developmentally appropriate foster care services and supports for young people must be extended beyond age 18 to at least to 21 years of age with broad and flexible criteria for eligibility to promote young people's voluntary participation in the program. Young people who want to exit from extended services and supports must be allowed to explore living on their own with the flexibility to return to extended care at any time.

***Success Beyond 18 Goal 2.*** Fully promote youth engagement in case planning and decision-making for all young people in foster care age 14 and older.

1. Washington State Institute of Public Policy, 2010.  
2. Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007.  
3. Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2013.

4. Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2013.



Young people in foster care must have opportunities to practice decision-making and planning and gain increasing levels of autonomy. Foster care services and supports must ensure that young people build the capacities that will support a healthy and productive adulthood. Additionally, young people will successfully leave care with a network of lasting relationships only when they are supported in building relational skills and are helped to resolve trauma-related barriers to developing and sustaining meaningful relationships.

**Success Beyond 18 Goal 3.** Provide quality oversight that ensures that developmentally appropriate supports and services lead to positive life outcomes for all young people in foster care, beginning no later than age 14 and continuing through extended voluntary care to at least age 21.

Similar to the guidance and nurturing that parents offer their teenage children as they grow into adults, child welfare agencies and the courts with responsibility for young people in foster care must attend to their unique and evolving needs. For young people ages 14 to 18, family and juvenile courts and child welfare agencies must be fully accountable for young people's safety, permanency, and well-being. Young people must be provided with legal representation based on their expressed desires and needs, opportunities for their voices to be heard in all court proceedings affecting them, and judicial decision-making that is based on a full understanding of the developmental strengths and needs of adolescents.

For young people age 18 to at least age 21 who are in extended voluntary care, there must be oversight to ensure the provision of developmentally appropriate services and supports and opportunities for them to mature into healthy adults. Oversight venues must recognize their legal adult status, the maturational progress of emerging adults, and their ongoing need for emotional connectedness and supportive relationships.

When the goals of **Success Beyond 18** are implemented through the core strategies of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (see Text Box on next page), a range of positive outcomes will be achieved:

- » Beginning in early adolescence, young people in foster care will be prepared for the transition from adolescence to young adulthood through a gradual process that builds on their developmental strengths

and needs;

- » The number of young people in foster care who leave care to permanent families before they reach age 18 will increase;
- » The resulting number of young people in foster care at age 18 who need extended care will decrease even further than the rates currently predicted by researchers<sup>5</sup> with new opportunities to dramatically improve outcomes for this relatively small number of young adults;
- » The number of young people in extended care at age 18 and beyond who leave care to permanent families and are well prepared for adulthood will dramatically increase; and
- » The well-being of all young people in foster care age 14 and older will be enhanced across all domains: educational achievement (secondary and post-secondary), physical health, mental health, and work readiness.

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5. Wulcyn & Collins, 2010.



## The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative's Five Core Strategies

The Jim Casey Initiative's core strategies support long term systems improvement and are instrumental in achieving the goals of *Success Beyond 18*. The experience of the Jim Casey Initiative makes clear that long term systems improvement can be achieved and sustained only when young people's voices are heard, the community is engaged, decisions are data-driven, public will and policy are mobilized on behalf of young people with foster care experiences and young people have access to the range of opportunities that are essential to their successful transition to adulthood.

- » **Youth Engagement:** Preparing young people to be meaningfully involved as decision makers and advocates.
- » **Partnerships and Resources:** Connecting to resources of public and private systems and philanthropy, expanding and deepening community support, and cultivating community champions for young people transitioning from care.
- » **Research, Evaluation, and Communications:** Involving key stakeholders in the use of data to drive decision-making and communications and to document results.
- » **Public Will and Policy:** Advancing policies and practices that improve outcomes for young people transitioning from foster care.
- » **Increased Opportunities:** Creating an array of opportunities and helping young people gain entry to them.

The Jim Casey Initiative's sites have found that when young people are adequately supported and genuinely engaged in making decisions about the direction of the work, they help produce some of the most powerful improvements in practice and policy.

## Adolescence as a Developmental Stage

Adolescence represents one of the critical transitions in the life span and is characterized by a tremendous pace in growth and change that is second only to that of infancy. Biological processes drive many aspects of adolescent growth and development, with the onset of puberty marking the passage from childhood to adolescence. The biological determinants of adolescence are universal; however, the duration and defining characteristics of this period may vary across time, cultures, and socioeconomic situations. The process of adolescence is a period of preparation for adulthood during which key developmental experiences occur. In addition to physical and sexual maturation, these experiences include movement toward social and economic independence, development of identity, the acquisition of skills needed to carry out adult relationships and roles, and the capacity for abstract reasoning. Adolescence is a time of tremendous growth and potential but it is also a time of considerable risk during which social contexts can exert powerful influences.<sup>6</sup>

6. World Health Organization, 2012.

## The Roles of Parents in the Lives of Adolescents and Young Adults

It is well understood that through the challenging developmental periods of adolescence and young adulthood, parents provide a vital supportive context.<sup>7</sup> Unlike friendship groups, which are not stable over time, parents are more or less permanent in an adolescent's life. During the adolescent and young adult years, parents maintain an influence in their child's life that is equal to, or greater than, the influence exerted by peers.<sup>8</sup> Parents attempt to balance the tasks of supporting and guiding their adolescents through "growing up" while providing space for their young people to gradually take on increasing levels of independence and develop higher levels of self-confidence in making decisions for themselves.

Parents significantly impact their adolescents' achievement motivation and behavior, their educational

7. Broderick, & Blewitt, 2006.

8. Stanton, 2012.



choices, and their adolescents' self-concepts.<sup>9</sup> Through positive relationships with their children, parents are able to decrease the risks that their adolescents will engage in dangerous behaviors and report symptoms of depression and increase the chances that their children will report high levels of perceived well-being.<sup>10</sup> The important role of parents in the lives of adolescents and young adults extends to all young people. A recent study examined the role of parents in the lives of high-risk youth marginalized by poverty, social stigma, personal and physical characteristics, ethnicity, and poor social or academic performance. Researchers found that parents exert a significant influence on the behaviors that bolster vulnerable young people's mental health and that these young people want their parents to remain in their lives.<sup>11</sup>

## The Needs of Young People in Foster Care

Adolescents who have experienced abuse and neglect and have been removed from their families typically lack the very benefits that parents provide to their children through the challenging development periods of adolescence and young adulthood. Although many adolescents in foster care have parents, they cannot safely live with them. Their parents frequently are unable to provide the guidance and support that young people need as they transition to adulthood. In some cases, young people have become disconnected from their parents altogether.

Too often, these young people live in group home settings and/or experience multiple changes in caregivers who have limited knowledge or understanding of who the young people are as individuals or what they need. Their caseworkers may offer some level of parent-like support in the form of guidance and encouragement, but the realities of excessive caseloads and frequent caseworker turnover significantly limit the extent to which caseworkers can play this role in young people's lives. At the same time, with placement moves, young people in care often lose key relationships with other adults who act like parents in their lives: teachers, coaches, faith leaders, and others.

With the foster care system's primary focus on safety, young people in foster care may face atypical restrictions on their development as adolescents and young

adults which act as barriers to common growing-up experiences such as participating in sports, spending the night at a friend's house, or joining the drama club. With these significant restrictions in place, young people may be prevented from exploring their interests, testing their capabilities, building resilience as they learn from experience, and developing and sustaining healthy relationships with peers, family, and a variety of adults (such as teachers, coaches, and employers) who can provide them with the support and guidance they need. Young people placed in group care settings are typically considered "troubled" even when placed in these settings solely as a result of foster home shortages, and they face significant restrictions on their activities. For those young people who are dealing with trauma and who express themselves through adolescent acting out,<sup>12</sup> the consequences can involve even greater restrictions and even more placement moves. Across the board, these atypical restrictions placed on the activities of young people in foster care work against healthy adolescent development and identity formation.

It is not surprising that young people in foster care who have not been reunited with their families of origin, adopted, or placed with permanent family through legal guardianship have mixed feelings as they approach age 18. They are often eager to leave a foster care system that has not met their needs, yet they also may have considerable anxiety about the dramatic changes that can occur when they reach 18. They typically are expected to shift from, on the one hand, having little say in their lives and being given few opportunities to practice making decisions to, on the other hand, being largely on their own. Unlike their peers in healthy intact families, they face sudden changes upon turning age 18 in where they live, what their opportunities are, and the adults who are there to support them. Young people in foster care are not given the opportunity to grow up gradually; they suddenly age out of a system.

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*"Everybody else grows up. Youth in foster care age out."*  
– Ipo Ma'e

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## Success Beyond 18: Meeting the Needs of Young People in Foster Care

Foster care is currently designed to serve young children and is not configured to meet the developmental needs of adolescents or young adults. Like all young people, those in care need support throughout the "growing up" period. At whatever age a young person in foster care may be, he or she needs to learn basic

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9. Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1997; Eccles, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1998; Klebanov, & Brooks-Gunn, 1992; Scanlan, & Lewthwaite, 1985, 1986; Stevenson, & Baker, 1987; Wilson, & Wilson, 1992.

10. Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Turrisi, & Johansson (2005); Hair, et al, (2005); Resick, Ireland, & Borowsky, 2004.

11. Unger, 2004.

12. Terzian, Hamilton, & Ling, 2011.





and applied academic attitudes, skills and behaviors; develop physically healthy attitudes, skills and behaviors; build resiliency in the face of challenges; and acquire positive social, vocational and civic attitudes, skills and behaviors.<sup>13</sup> Without these opportunities beginning in puberty and continuing throughout adolescence, young people who age out of foster care face extremely troubling outcomes.

Simply extending traditional foster care to young people once they reach age 18 will not provide them with the developmentally appropriate supports and services that they need to become healthy and productive adults (see Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, *The Adolescent Brain: New Research and Its Implications for Young People Transitioning From Foster Care*). Nor will foster care “as usual” succeed in engaging young people with vitally needed permanent family connections and other caring adults. Existing extended services typically do not continue to address the needs of young people age 18 and older for permanent families nor do they focus on supporting the young person in building strong social networks. Child welfare systems across the country know all too well that the majority of young people do not choose to participate in continuing services at age 18 when what is offered is simply “more of the same.” As adults, they can simply walk away. More than 25,000 young people did so in 2011 on or near their 18th birthdays.<sup>14</sup>

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*“We need not only extended supports and services but to DO IT RIGHT!”*

*Doing it right means not just making 21 the new 18 but having developmentally appropriate supports in place so that young people are prepared to be successful on their own by age 21.”*

– Mike Peno

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## Success Beyond 18: The Goals

The three policy and practice goals of *Success Beyond 18* provide states with a framework for identifying and taking specific action steps to significantly change the experiences of young people in foster care prior to and after reaching age 18 and improve their outcomes. This framework supports young people’s age appropriate development and healthy transitions from adolescence through emerging adulthood and into full-fledged adulthood – just as parents and families support their young people through these challenging developmental periods.

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13. Ferber & Pittman, 2002.

14. US Department of Health & Human Services, 2012.

**Success Beyond 18 Goal 1.** Extend care for young people beyond age 18 to at least 21 and do it right by ensuring services and supports are offered based on the unique developmental tasks of this life stage and their legal status as adults.

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*“In Iowa, where I was in foster care, there is an Aftercare Program in place that helps youth who have experienced foster care transition to adulthood when they turn 18.*

*I met with a Self-Sufficiency Advocate twice a month. Throughout our time together, she helped me practice budgeting and helped me to form short-term and long-term goals in many areas like education and relationships. This extra support gave me a cushion of support as I tried to figure out life on my own. This was especially important to me because I had moved to a new city for college and left my support system behind. Through the opportunity to stay in the Aftercare Program until age 21, I was given an opportunity to practice vital skills like budgeting and goal-making and am now confident in my ability to do both.*

*The program allowed me to safely and easily transition because I was never without a supportive relationship that not only cared about my outcome, but also had the connections that I didn’t have with a normal parent.*

*She was like a compass and would always keep me on the right path going in the right direction.”*

–Samanthya Amann

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*Success Beyond 18* Goal 1 addresses the need to provide young people in foster care with supports and guidance that are developmentally appropriate as they enter and continue through the developmental stage of emerging adulthood (see Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, *Foster Care to 21: Doing It Right*). With the implementation of the two other *Success Beyond 18* goals that are focused on case planning and oversight for young people no later than age 14, we anticipate the number of young adults needing extended care will decline as more young people leave care to permanent families before age 18. For those young adults who need extended services and supports, however, we must design and implement extended care the right way to ensure that young people will utilize extended care and experience positive outcomes.

More than 27,000 young people enter foster care each year at ages 16 and 17. Case planning, permanency planning and preparation for adulthood may be

in early stages when they reach age 18. The arbitrary conclusion of supports and services for young people in foster care at age 18 only serves to diminish their prospects for successful adulthood by ending all efforts to secure lifelong families for them and help them establish strong social networks. Doing extended voluntary care “right” is modeled on the roles that parents play in their emerging adults’ lives and is informed by more than 50 years of youth development experience and the science of adolescent and young adult brain development.

### **What Parents Do – Support for Emerging Adults.**

Over the past decade, there has been increasing recognition that young people do not move seamlessly from adolescence at age 18 to young adulthood at age 19, as traditional models of human development have suggested. Contemporary realities undermine the belief that young people become full-fledged adults in their late teens. Support has grown for the concept of emerging adulthood, a period during which a young person gradually moves toward independence rather than achieving it at a pre-determined age.<sup>15</sup> The many developmental tasks of adolescence and young adulthood have remained the same over time, but science has demonstrated that in our current complex social,

economic and technological world, young people need longer periods of time to achieve them.

Given the complexities of maturing in the current environment, it is not surprising that a growing number of young people outside the foster care system continue to live at home until well into their twenties and that parents do not view their children as adults until they reach their mid to late twenties.<sup>16</sup> Parents are continuing to “parent” for much longer than has historically been the case. The parents of emerging adults also increasingly find themselves in a position of having to welcome their young people home after they have attempted to make it on their own in uncertain economic times. Among adults ages 25 to 34, 61 percent say that they have friends or family members who have moved back in with their parents over the past few years because of economic conditions.<sup>17</sup>

**What Young People in Foster Care Need.** The critical roles of parents in the lives of emerging adults and the expanding base of scientific knowledge about brain development make clear that the concept of young people aging out of foster care to live independently at age 18 is deeply flawed. As suggested by neuroscience, these young people are on a grad-

## **What We Know From Science about Adolescent and Emerging Adult Brain Development**

A growing body of scientific evidence shows that adolescence and emerging adulthood are periods of gradual and continuing brain development. Earlier beliefs that the brain reaches full development in early childhood have been replaced with a new understanding of a second window of neurological growth and development during adolescence.

The gradual development of the brain’s pre-frontal cortex – the seat of executive functions such as reasoning, decision-making, and impulse control – begins in puberty and generally continues through the mid-20s. With the many multi-faceted developmental tasks that adolescents and emerging adults are expected to master in an increasingly complex world, researchers theorize that the consolidation of adult status likely occurs not at 18 or 21, but closer to age 30.

Neuroscience makes clear that support during the cognitive, social, and emotional development processes of adolescence and emerging adulthood can lead to healthy and constructive adulthood. Adolescence is a time of both increased vulnerability and opportunity, when exposure to a variety of influences can have chances of lasting positive effects. The periods of adolescence and emerging adulthood therefore provide rich opportunities to support young people in healthy development. Opportunity, investment, and education are essential during these unique developmental periods so that young people can acquire knowledge, skills, and confidence to carry throughout their lives.

**Source:** Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2012.

15. Arnett, 2007.

16. Nelson, et al., 2006.

17. Pareker, 2012.





ual developmental trajectory from adolescence to full-fledged adulthood that likely will not be achieved until at least age 25 or 26. As emerging adults with complex histories—histories often involving trauma and loss—they typically need even greater support from family, other caring adults, and community to complete the developmental tasks of this transitional phase. Yet, these young people often lack the active presence of caring adults in their lives who can provide financial assistance, lend emotional and social support, or offer a safe harbor to turn to in times of unemployment or other difficulties. Young people in foster care deserve to have a lifelong family. Until that goal is achieved, they need the support of adults who can step into parenting roles or serve as parent-like adults in their lives. They often need these adults as well as services and other supports to an even greater degree than their non-foster care peers as they frequently have missed the typical “growing up” opportunities that other youth have throughout childhood and adolescence.

In particular, youth in foster care need the support of adults who can step into parenting roles or serve as parent-like adults in their lives. They need these adults as well as services and other supports to an even greater degree than their non-foster care peers as they have missed the typical “growing up” opportunities that other youth have throughout childhood and adolescence.

Extended voluntary care must be designed to provide young people with meaningful, healthy connections with family members and other caring adults already in their lives and with opportunities to create and sustain new family relationships.

It must focus on building and strengthening young people’s resilience as key to setting them on the right path to adulthood (see Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, *Trauma-informed practice with young people in foster care*). Extended care must recognize that resilience is supported by external resources that include parental support, adult mentoring, and community organizations that promote positive youth development.<sup>18</sup>

All aspects of extended care – what it is named, the placement options offered to young people, the nature and scope of case management, the permanency planning and service planning processes, the

preparation for adulthood services and supports, policies regarding voluntary departure and return, and post-extended care planning – must be developed and implemented in ways that expressly acknowledge the unique developmental strengths and needs of young people as they gradually transition to adulthood. We should expect that all young people in foster care at the age of 18 will benefit from this newly designed, developmentally appropriate extended care program that provides them with the essential supports they need to become connected and productive adults by age 25.<sup>19</sup>

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*“I feel that I missed out on a lot of valuable and lasting relationships.*

*When we are not given the chance to connect with the adults in our community and those we interact with on a daily basis, we are more vulnerable to the reality of having no permanency and people to call on when the road becomes difficult.”*

– Eddye Vanderkwaak

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### **Specific Steps That States Can Take to Achieve Success Beyond 18 Goal 1.**

States can take steps now to support young people’s successful transitions from adolescence to young adulthood by extending the availability and enhancing the quality of foster care for young people age 18 to at least age 21. The following recommendations provide ways that states can maximize and move beyond existing policy and practice options. Articulating good policy and practice is an important step. However, budgets, training content, evaluation procedures, and contracting procedures must be aligned to support and reinforce these policies and practices. Until that alignment occurs, actual practice may lack fidelity or be inconsistent.

### **Maximizing Existing Policy and Practice Options**

» *Undertake a collaborative process with young people and other stakeholders in designing extended care.* Extended voluntary care services and supports should appropriately reflect the interests of young people who will be served through the program. Partnerships with community-based organizations can broaden the range of developmentally appropriate services and supports made available to young people in extended care, including educational, employment and other youth engagement efforts.

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18. Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005.

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19. See Courtney, Dworsky & Napolitano, 2013.



Nebraska actively consulted young people as they considered an extended voluntary care program. The state engaged 104 young people with experience in the state's foster care system and asked them to complete surveys regarding program design options for extended services and supports to 21. The survey was distributed in nine cities across the state and at eight focus groups. Among other questions, the young people were asked their ideas for a young adult-friendly name for the program. They were provided some initial options, each of which received fairly equal approval: Extended Services and Support to 21 (34%), Transitional Support to 21 (32%), and Collaborative Care (28%). Several young people recommended variations of the available options: Support to 21, The Growin' Up Program, Successful Futures, Friendly Helpers, 21 Jump Start, and 21 Care.

» **Leverage federal funding** made available through the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 to:

- Expand foster care with federal support to age 21
- Redeploy funds previously spent on this population toward developing services and programs that are developmentally appropriate for young people age 18 and older

» **Take advantage of new options under the federal law** to design services and supports that align with what we know is best from developmental science and best practice, including:

- Providing options for supervised independent living arrangements that are appropriate to the developmental strengths and needs of young people
- Allowing voluntary departures from care and re-entry as young people "test out" independence and learn from experience

As of September 2012, 16 states have approved plans for extended care that allow for voluntary departure and reentry to the maximum age set by the state: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and West Virginia.

*"We are transitioning from care but we aren't all leaving from the same platform; some are stable while others are crumbling and must be rebuilt.*

*This might require some youth to destroy everything they have known in order to rebuild a new life. By being able to return to services and supports, a youth is provided a true support system that is there regardless of how many times a youth seemingly fails.*

*Youth are given freedom not only to fail but also to rise again and succeed."*

– **Samanthya Amann**

- Allowing young people to enter into voluntary agreements that create a contract between young people and the foster care agency with clearly defined responsibilities and provides the additional benefit of allowing more youth to be eligible for federal Title IV-E reimbursement to the state

Under a voluntary foster care agreement, the young adult makes a choice to continue in the extended care program. The original abuse/neglect case is closed. The young adult signs as his/her own guardian and financial eligibility is based on the youth's income, not on his/her parents' income at the time of the youth's original removal. As a result, most young adults are Title IV-E eligible and the child welfare agency can claim federal financial support for the youth's placement in extended care. As of September 2012, seven states plan on utilizing voluntary placements agreements with all young people in their extended care programs: California, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Dakota, Texas, and West Virginia.

- Providing direct foster care maintenance payments to young adults to provide them with opportunities to take on increasing adult responsibilities



As of September 2012, 12 states with extended care programs are planning to make maintenance payments directly to young adults: California, District of Columbia, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and West Virginia.

- » *Maximize participation of young people in extended care* by defining the federal eligibility criteria broadly within the federal scope.

**California** defines one of the five federal eligibility criteria for extended care, *“participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employment,”* as “an individualized program based on a youth-centered assessment of skills and needs. These activities could be self-directed, completed in conjunction with a non-minor dependent’s caregiver or social worker, or part of an organized program.” This broad definition allows most young people to meet the criteria and benefit from extended care.

- » *Align extended care policies with approaches to case planning and oversight* (see *Success Beyond 18* Goals 2 and 3).

## Going Beyond

- » *Develop policies and practices to ensure developmentally appropriate extended services and supports specifically for young people with higher levels of need*, including young people with developmental delays and mental health challenges. These policies may include graduated levels of supervision and supports. These policies optimally are developed collaboratively with partners such as adult behavioral health systems.
- » *Develop policies and practices to ensure appropriate services and supports are extended beyond age 21 to secure permanent families for young people and facilitate successful transitions from foster care.* These efforts should be designed in light of the reality that young people generally do not reach maturity until age 25 and will always need caring relationships with family. Services and supports may entail developing permanency planning services designed specifically for young adults, redirecting or retooling independent living services to extend beyond age

21, and engaging with adult education and workforce programs.

These strategies are described in greater detail in the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Issue Briefs, *Extending Foster Care Beyond 18: Getting Started* and in future issue briefs, *Extending Foster Care Beyond 18: Placement Setting Options* and *Extending Foster Care Beyond 18: Partnering to Build Supportive Services*

**Success Beyond 18 Goal 2.** Fully promote youth engagement in case planning and decision-making for all young people in foster care age 14 and older

*“In my case planning, I wasn’t involved. People were speaking for me and were caught up in procedures and what was required of them.*

*We would sit in meetings and go through everything on a checklist.*

*I thought, ‘how can this seem so simplified when my life is not so simple?’*

*Case planning was about meeting requirements rather than personalizing the planning for me. No one turned to me and asked me what I wanted. No one focused on the finer details of my personal trajectory. It is really all about getting past the whole checklist thing and emphasizing the finer details of each young person’s life.”*

– Joshua LouAllen Grubb

*“All in all, I was not engaged in my case planning.*

*It’s important not to confuse being informed with being engaged.*

*I was informed of every court date, every meeting, every supervised visit and every time I was moved. I was not engaged in how I felt after each hearing, what the main focus of the meetings were, how I felt the supervised visits went and how I was truly handling being moved from home to home.*

*I was not given a high amount of decision-making in my case. It made me feel as if my safety was truly not a concern and that everyone’s goal was just to get another family out of the system.*

*All the decision-making and things essentially ‘being done for me’ did me no good when I aged out and began to make my transition to adulthood.”*

– Eddy Vanderkwaak

**Success Beyond 18** Goal 2 directly addresses the need to support young people in fully engaging in their own case planning and in making decisions that affect their lives. The active engagement of young people in their case planning is expressly recognized in the Fostering Connections Act which requires that each child, during the 90-day period immediately prior to aging out of care, be provided with assistance and support in developing a transition plan that is *personalized at the direction of the child*, includes specific options on housing, health insurance, education, local opportunities for mentors, and workforce supports and employment services” (italics added).<sup>20</sup> The Chafee Foster Care Independence Act requires that young people participate directly in developing their program.<sup>21</sup>

When young people in foster care are actively engaged in case planning and decision-making, they are able to take advantage of crucial opportunities to develop resilience and autonomy; practice making decisions and taking on increasing levels of responsibilities for themselves; and build and strengthen the social capital that is essential for healthy development through adolescence and adulthood. They are able to take on greater levels of responsibility as they continue the gradual maturation process toward adulthood.

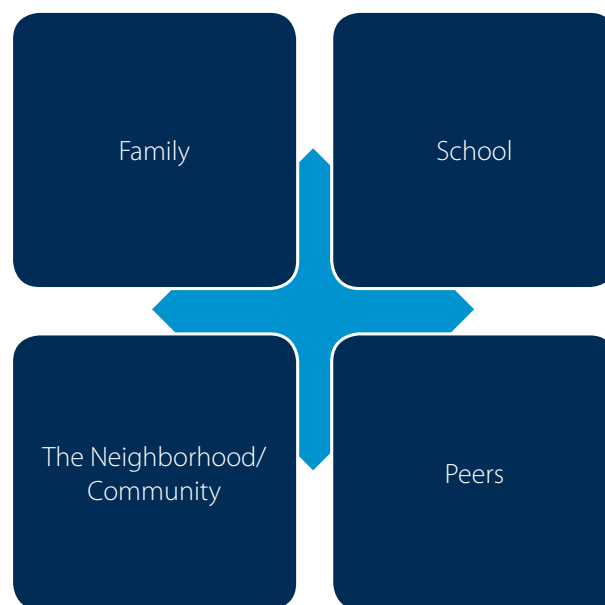
When case planning is done “right,” young people have ample opportunities for legal family relationships – through reuniting safely with their parents or primary caregivers, through adoption with relatives or non-relatives, or through legal guardianship. The active involvement of young people as leaders in their case planning process provides them with access to caring adults – caregivers, family members, caseworkers, and other significant adults in their lives – who can play meaningful roles. Through building relationships with these adults, young people can heal and open to family relationships that offer them the safety, security, and caring missing in past relationships. As more young people leave foster care to permanent families, fewer young people will face their 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays in foster care and the prospect of remaining in extended care or aging out to live on their own.

When case planning is done “right” for young people in early to mid-adolescence, the small number of young people who need extended care services at age 18 will be far better prepared to take on full leadership of their planning teams. They will already have had opportunities to strengthen their executive functioning capabilities, and they will be better prepared to take full

advantage of the educational, employment, financial asset building and other opportunities that extended care provides. Parents typically provide their adolescents and emerging adults with these experiences; young people in foster care deserve no less.

**What Parents Do – Support for Autonomy Development.** Adolescents develop autonomy through their relationships within their families and with people outside of their families. Support for autonomy development that is provided by others in the social context (particularly by parents and family members) positively influences other aspects of adolescent functioning. Even in early adolescence, for example, adolescents whose parents gradually involve them in more decisions that affect them are less likely to be heavily oriented toward peer opinions and peer acceptance than those adolescents whose parents allow less involvement in decision-making.<sup>22</sup> A balance between independent, self-confident action and positive relationships with others appears to be optimal for young people’s psychological adjustment and development.<sup>23</sup>

**What We Know from Science About Social Capital.** Science has furthered our understanding of the essential role of social capital as young people move through the complex developmental tasks of adolescence and emerging adulthood (see Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, *Social Capital: Building Quality Networks for Young People in Foster Care*).



All young people need social capital across multiple domains: family, schools, peers and friends,

20. 42 U.S.C. §475.

21. National Resource Center on Youth Development, 2012.

22. Fuligni & Eccles, 1993.

23. Helgeson, 1994; Sessa & Steinberg, 1991.



and community/neighborhoods. Social capital is intricately involved in the young person's development of autonomy and identity<sup>24</sup> with research documenting that successful development through adolescence and young adulthood is tied specifically to the young person's relationships with his or her family.<sup>25</sup> Schools represent important sources of social capital through relationships with teachers, coaches, counselors and schoolmates.<sup>26</sup> Neighborhoods are important contexts for adolescents and have a significant impact on youth's well-being<sup>27</sup> as young people find opportunities to forge supportive networks with people and organizations in their communities.<sup>28</sup> Positive peer relationships are associated with self-esteem, a healthy self-image, and greater social competence.<sup>29</sup>

**What Young People in Foster Care Need.** Many young people in foster care need to be supported through building relationships with caring adults. Young people need adults who can help them make sense of their histories and help address trauma, if necessary. Through the relational component of case planning, young people can build relationships with supportive and caring adults who support them in their journey of healthy development, healing and building resilience (see Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, *Trauma-informed practice with young people in foster care*). Person-centered planning (see Text Box) provides a proven approach for supporting young people in healing and strengthening resilience.

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*"I was not engaged in case planning and I wanted to be because I felt it is my life and I did not want everybody else making decisions for me.*

*I at least thought I knew what was best for me but did not even have the opportunity to express an opinion on my own life."*

– Mike Peno

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Young people in foster care may be particularly challenged with respect to autonomy development as they typically lack a sense of control over their lives. Decisions often have been made for rather than with them and they have not felt that their voices genuinely matter within a system that may have placed more em-

## Core Elements of Person-Centered Planning

- » Convening a group of individuals committed to the person for whom the plan will be developed, including, at the center of the group, the focal person;
- » Gathering information about who the person is, his/her passions, needs and desires;
- » Developing a dream or vision for a desirable future based on the person's gifts, interests, and desires;
- » Developing a plan to achieve the dream or vision;
- » Taking actions to achieve the dream or vision; and
- » Reviewing actions and making changes to the plan as needed.

**Sources:** Kilbane & Sanderson, 2004; Medora & Ledger, 2005.

phasis on their deficits than on their strengths. Young people in foster care who have not had the benefit of caring adults committed to fostering their interests, passions and aspirations may not see the purpose of a planning team. They may not feel that there is anything to work toward.

All young people – including young people in foster care – need opportunities to begin exercising their fledgling executive functions at age 13 and 14. As young people move into extended care services and supports at age 18, they must be fully directing all aspects of their own life planning (see Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, *Authentic Youth Engagement: Youth-Adult Partnerships* and *Case Planning for Healthy Development*).

**Specific Steps that States Can Take to Achieve Success Beyond 18 Goal 2.** States can improve outcomes for young people in foster care by ensuring that young people direct their own personalized case planning process. A variety of teaming processes can be used to orchestrate the most effective case planning with and on behalf of young people. The case planning and decision-making processes envisioned by this goal differ significantly from the common case planning processes in many states, as shown in Table 1.

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24. Chan, 2012.

25. Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Cooney & Kurtz, 1996.

26. Paxton, 1999; Sampson & Morenoff, 1999; Schmitt & Kleine, 2010.

27. Brooks-Gunn, et al., 1997; Ingoldsby & Shaw, 2002.

28. Dallago, et al., 2009; Pretty, 2002.

29. Furman, 1999.



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*"When I was 14, my biological mother's parental rights were terminated.*

*Even though we had a family team meeting, I felt completely useless and like my opinion didn't matter.*

*I was shipped off to live with relatives that were 10 years older than me whom I had never met. What I had wanted, what made the most sense to me was to stay where I was, in the school where I was, and in the foster family.*

*I was not listened to. Because of this, I returned to my home state 11 months later and had to re-transition after a rather difficult and damaging living situation.*

*I wish I would have been listened to, not just heard."*

– Samantha Amann

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## Maximizing Existing Policy and Practice Options

- » ***Prepare young people to take leadership roles in directing their own personalized case planning*** by fully engaging them by age 14 in the planning process; identifying and addressing any barriers to their full participation and leadership; ensuring they fully understand their rights, responsibilities and opportunities; and preparing them to take a full leadership role in their case planning at age 18.
- » ***Actively engage individuals that the young person has designated to participate in his/her personalized case planning.*** By providing a young person with the power to designate who he/she wants on her planning team, respecting the young person's choices, and actively engaging those selected individuals, child welfare agencies create important opportunities for young people to exercise autonomy and build social capital.

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*"It is super-important for people who are involved in a young person's life to be involved in case planning and team meetings. Young people should feel comfortable in inviting these important people to all meetings."*

– Joshua LouAllen Grubb

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- » ***Require the active engagement of family members and caregivers who are playing a "parenting" role in the young person's life.*** Case planning must actively engage the young person's parents and extended family members, as appropriate, as well as current and former caregivers who have played a parenting role in the young person's life. These individuals play crucial roles in supporting the young person in es-

tablishing permanent family relationships and vital social capital that will support him or her through young adulthood and beyond.

- » ***Require that case planning focus on relationship-building for the young person,*** strengthening and/or creating opportunities for young people to enhance relational skills and helping them build and maintain relationships across all social capital domains.
- » ***Require that for any case that does not implement client-directed case planning for a young person over age 14, the reasons must be clearly documented in the young person's case record.*** The presumption must always be that a client-directed case planning approach is in the best interest of the young person. When it has been determined in the rare case that such an approach is not appropriate, compelling reasons must be clearly documented in the court record.

The **Maine Youth in Care Bill of Rights** provides that young people have the right to be included in their case planning with a team of people that advocates with them and for them; have meaningful participation in their Family Team Meetings, treatment team meetings, court, and school meetings; have family members or other supportive people of their choice present at their team meetings; have access to resources and be able to seek information about resources; and have access to their case records and expect accuracy in what is recorded in their case record.

## Going Beyond

- » ***Provide young people with positive youth development opportunities that will bolster their desire and ability to participate in their planning and decision-making processes.*** In order to be ready to be at the planning table, many young people need to have positive relationships with adults that will serve as a bridge to trusting other adults, opportunities to identify their interests, build strengths and expectations of themselves, and pursue their passions.
- » ***Develop mechanisms to regularly ascertain the level of young people's preparation, involvement, empowerment and satisfaction*** with their case planning process and the outcomes that are being achieved with and for them.



**Table 1. Common Case Planning Practice and Redesigned Case Planning for Young People in Foster Care**

Common Case Planning Practice	Redesigned Case Planning
There is uneven involvement of young people on their planning teams.	No later than age 14, the young person plays an active role on his/her planning team
Young people are not given specific leadership roles or responsibilities on their teams.	The young person's active role includes taking on specific leadership roles and responsibilities beginning no later than age 14.
Young people do not have the power to designate team members.	The young person designates the people whom he or she wants on the planning team so that the right people are at the table.
The planning team focuses primarily on legal permanence or independent living goals.	The planning focuses on the comprehensive strengths and needs of the young person, which include the range of well-being needs and his/her needs for quality relationships.
Risk management concerns limit the willingness of the agency to allow the young person to have experiences involving increasing and developmentally appropriate levels of autonomy.	The planning team works closely with the young person to identify and provide experiences that lend themselves to increasing and developmentally appropriate levels of autonomy for the young person.
Risk management concerns limit the willingness of the agency to allow young people to engage in typical adolescent activities (including extra-curricular activities, part-time employment and dating) that may pose any type of safety risk to the young person or risk to the agency.	The planning team works closely with the young person around his or her interests and goals and supports the young person in engaging in after school and extra-curricular activities, part-time employment, and social opportunities that are part of the "growing up" process.
When the young person uses poor judgment, the planning team responds with sanctions or restrictions on the young person.	When the young person uses poor judgment, the planning team supports him/her in learning from mistakes, making adjustments, and enhancing decision-making and other skills.
Risk management concerns limit the young person's interaction with peers, extended family, and community members, thereby limiting the extent to which social capital is built for the youth.	The planning team focuses on supporting the young person in building social capital across all domains and engages individuals in the young person's social networks as members of the planning team.
By age 18, the young person remains a member of his/her planning team and has some input into the planning process or leaves care.	By age 18, the young person is the leader of his or her planning team and is directing all aspects of life planning for himself/herself.
The young person has a static exit plan.	The young person has an evolving comprehensive transition plan (or life plan) and supports to fully implement and adapt that plan.
The young person is not assessed as to his or her ability to participate in the planning and decision-making processes. Barriers to his/her participation are not identified or addressed.	Focus is on preparing and supporting young people to be active participants and leaders on their planning teams. Barriers to their full participation/leadership (such as distrust of adults, poor self-esteem, or lack of a sense of purpose) are identified and addressed.
There are no requirements related to documentation of compelling reasons for not actively engaging the young person as a member/leader of his/her planning team.	If a young person is not fully engaged as member/leader of his/her planning team, compelling reasons are documented in the case record and approved by the court.

These strategies are described in greater detail in upcoming Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Issue Briefs, *Extending Foster Care Beyond 18: Case Planning for Young Adults* and *Their Life – Their Voices: Young People’s Feedback on their Case Planning Experience*

**Success Beyond 18 Goal 3.** Provide quality oversight that ensures that developmentally appropriate supports and services lead to positive life outcomes for all young people in foster care, beginning no later than age 14 and continuing through extended voluntary care to at least age 21.

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*“The challenge that I faced in court that when given the opportunity to give voice to what I wanted, I had to tell my social worker, who then told my GAL [Guardian Ad Litem], who then told my attorney who would then tell the judge and by the time it got that high up, it was nothing near the request I made. The judge never spoke directly to me but asked my representation how I was doing. It was strange to hear these individuals dialogue about me and was frustrating as well. Experiencing this disappointment more than once, I found myself giving up and shutting down during the hearings.*

*I do not feel that I was given the opportunity to speak up in court about what mattered to me.*

*No one ever asked how I was doing in the homes I was in.*

*I feel that they assumed that because I was quiet, I was ‘ok.’”*

*– Eddy Vanderkwaak*

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*“I was fortunate to have the same GAL and the same judge throughout my court experience.*

*I had a great experience because I felt listened to and heard on most issues.*

*We had court hearings every five months and I never felt out of place or worried about going to court. The judge welcomed me and always took time to address me directly.*

*He treated me as a normal kid. I’ll never forget my final court experience.*

*The official court proceedings had finished and the judge left the bench to give me a hug and wish me the best for the rest of my life. I felt like more than a case number.*

*My accomplishments were celebrated and I had people who cared for me.”*

*– Samantha Amann*

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**Success Beyond 18** Goal 3 addresses the essential need for oversight of the foster care system as it provides developmentally appropriate foster care services and supports to young people from age 14 through age 18 and beyond. Accountability is assured only through careful oversight of the quality of the services and supports that are provided consistent with young people’s developmental needs as adolescents and emerging adults and through close monitoring to ensure that positive outcomes for young people are achieved.

Rethinking judicial oversight is essential as states implement a redesigned developmentally appropriate case planning process for young people age 14 through 18. Courts must ensure that child welfare agencies are fully implementing a case planning process that engages the young person as a leader in developmentally appropriate ways, engages family and other significant adults as permanency plans are made and implemented, and prepares young people for the transition to a healthy and productive adulthood. As the courts oversee this process, it can be expected that fewer young people will remain in foster care until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays and require extended services and supports. For the relatively small number of young people who need extended care, oversight is essential to ensure that services and supports are responsive to them in their new legal status as adults as well as to their continuing physiological, psychological and social development as emerging adults.

As states “do it right” in extending foster care services and supports based on the unique developmental tasks of adolescence and emerging adulthood and their legal status as adults and fully promote youth engagement in case planning, the time is ripe for quality oversight of foster care systems to ensure that positive outcomes are achieved for young people in foster care from age 14 to at least age 21.

As states “do it right” in extending foster care services and supports based on the unique developmental tasks of adolescence and emerging adulthood and their legal status as adults (**Success Beyond 18** Goal 1) and fully promote youth engagement in case planning (**Success Beyond 18** Goal 2), the time is ripe for quality oversight of foster care systems to ensure that positive outcomes are achieved for young people in foster care from age 14 to at least age 21. Oversight mechanisms must be in place from the outset to ensure that the policy goals driving the redesign are achieved and sustained. Without a concurrent focus on accountability,



it will not be possible to achieve the outcomes for young people that *Success Beyond 18* champions nor will it be possible to hold child welfare agencies accountable.

**What Parents Do and What the Research Says – Parental Oversight During Adolescence.** One of the key tasks of parents is to supervise their adolescent’s activities.<sup>30</sup> Adolescents benefit from parental support that encourages autonomy development and identity development yet ensures continued monitoring and emotional connectedness.<sup>31</sup> As young people mature, the nature and level of parental oversight changes in response to the young person’s greater autonomy and ability to take on increasing levels of adult responsibilities.<sup>32</sup>

Adolescents benefit from parental support that encourages autonomy development and identity development yet ensures continued monitoring and emotional connectedness.

**Systems’ Responsibilities for Young People in Foster Care.** Both child welfare agencies and the courts have responsibility for the quality of services provided to and the outcomes achieved for young people in foster care. The nature of that responsibility differs with respect to young people under the age of majority who are in foster care and young people age 18 and older who are in extended care.

## Young People Under the Age of Majority

Young people in foster care who are under the legal age of majority are under court supervision based on their age and dependency status. Not yet adults, their right to self-determination is limited. They are subject to restrictions on their choices about health care, privacy, curfew, freedom of movement and employment. They are subject to compulsory education laws. Child welfare agencies are the legal custodians of these youth, and courts are charged with protecting these young people from further harm, overseeing the services and supports that they are provided, and making timely decisions about their futures. Child welfare agencies facilitate and family and juvenile courts oversee young people’s acquisition of the skills and competencies they need to successfully navigate the adult world. These systems are mandated to ensure

that each young person achieves the benefits of a permanent family through reunification, adoption, guardianship, or other permanent arrangements. For young people ages 14 to age 18, it is essential that the foster care system and the court fully respond to their unique developmental strengths and needs, including their continuing needs for family support and emotional connections, their growing capacity for decision-making about their futures, and their increasing autonomy as individuals.

## Young People Age 18 and Older

When young people in foster care turn 18, they do not suddenly experience a significant psychological or biological change, but they are adults, which significantly alters their relationship with the foster care system and the courts. They are no longer mandated to remain in foster care nor remain under the jurisdiction and oversight of the courts. Yet, as neuroscience and the growing understanding of emerging adulthood make clear, they are not yet developmentally ready to take on the roles and responsibilities of full-fledged adulthood.

**What Young People In Foster Care Need.** Young people in foster care need oversight that ensures the accountability of the foster care system at the systems level and for each individual case. The accountability of child welfare agencies has been broadly recognized,<sup>33</sup> and the need for accountability in the provision of extended care is no less critical. The foster care system must offer a broad array of supportive services that can be flexibly adapted to each young person’s individual situation. Child welfare agencies must have the capacity to properly match and deliver supports, services and supervision that meet the developmental needs of each young person in a context relevant to his or her life situation. The courts play a key role in providing oversight to ensure the accountability of child welfare agencies; the judiciary is the only branch of government with the power to require other agencies to adhere to performance standards and to demand accountability from individuals.<sup>34</sup>

For young people under their jurisdiction, courts must ensure that young people are provided with legal advocacy based on the young person’s expressed desires and needs and are provided opportunities for their voices to be heard in all court proceedings affecting them. The presiding judge should ensure that all judges and magistrates receive the necessary training to make decisions that are based on a full understanding of the developmental strengths and needs of adolescents.

30. Aufseer, Jekielek, & Brown, 2006; Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, & Dittus, 2010; Ozmete & Bayoglu, 2009.

31. Doyle, Moretti, Voss, & Margolese, 2006.

32. Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984.

33. Krebs & Pitcoff, 2004.

34. National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 1978.



Judges must bring to each proceeding both knowledge and skills in hearing, monitoring and resolving the case; a commitment to timely proceedings and decisions; enforcement of rules; and an openness to interacting with young people, families and professionals.<sup>35</sup>

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*"My GAL was dedicated and always able to get the job done.*

*I felt very intimidated by the judge and the courtroom – but I felt good that my GAL was there and could communicate my needs and desires to the court.*

*It was extremely important to have her there.*

*The court hearings were very quick – like a 'check up' – but if I needed something, she was there to make sure things happened.*

*One time, my brothers and I really needed to be moved from a resource home, I talked with her about it, and we were out of that home.*

*When I turned 18, we maintained a relationship.*

*I interned for her at her office after my freshman year. I can always go to her if I need anything.*

*She is what they call my 'social capital.'"*

*– Joshua LouAllen Grubb*

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For young people ages 18 to at least age 21 who are in extended care, accountability must be ensured through oversight provided in venues that recognize them as adults, the maturational progress of emerging adults, and their ongoing needs for emotional connectedness and supportive relationships. The oversight venue may be the court, or it may be an appropriate administrative body. Irrespective of the venue selected, it is essential that oversight be based on a firm understanding of the developmental needs of young people with respect to services, supports, and supervision; the responsibilities of both the young person *and* the foster care system while the young person is in extended care; and the outcomes that are to be achieved for each young person.

**Specific Steps that States Can Take to Achieve Success Beyond 18 Goal 3.** Greater accountability regarding the quality of foster care can be achieved through quality oversight of the services, supports, supervision, and outcomes for young people in foster care.

Quality oversight can be achieved by taking the following steps for all young people who are in foster care *or* extended voluntary care:

- » **Ensure that the scope of inquiry includes the young person's well-being needs as well as their safety and permanency needs.** The scope of inquiry by the oversight body should address the vital elements of well-being that are essential to healthy adolescent and young adult development: relationships across all social capital domains, health, mental health, education, employment, and housing. A broad scope of inquiry is essential irrespective of the young person's age. The definition of safety and permanency, however, will change when a young person reaches later adolescence or becomes a legal adult. Safety needs are significantly different for very young children, pre-teens, adolescents and young people who at age 18, 19 and 20 are considered legal adults. For that reason, safety considerations that are appropriate for younger children in need of protection are generally not relevant for adolescents and young adults. The scope of inquiry for these young people should emphasize the importance of providing the normal "growing up" experiences that are essential to healthy development unhindered by child-based safety considerations.
- » **Provide self-advocacy education and training to support young people, including those with higher needs or developmental disabilities, in all life situations,** including court and administrative venues, to analyze problems, identify goals, plan strategies, and take constructive actions to achieve their goals. Self-advocacy skills are particularly crucial for young people ages 18 to 21 given the higher levels of responsibility that they shoulder, but the building of those skills must begin in early adolescence.
- » **Develop mechanisms to regularly ascertain the level of young people's preparation, involvement, empowerment, and satisfaction in administrative and judicial hearings.** Young people's feedback should be captured at least yearly regarding their experiences in hearings, including their perceptions as to whether their voices were heard, they were treated with dignity and respect, and the results helped advance their life goals.

*In 2012, the Texas Supreme Court, Permanent Judicial Commission on Children, Court Improvement Project developed a Youth Satisfaction Survey to learn more from young people about their experiences in court.*

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35. Jones, 2006.





*“The role of the juvenile court judge is unlike any other. In the traditional judicial role, deciding a legal issue may complete the judge’s task; however, in deciding the future of a child or family member, the juvenile court judge must, in addition to making a legal decision, be prepared to take on the role of an administrator, a collaborator, a convener, and an advocate.”*

– Judge Len Edwards, 2004

Specifically for young people beginning at least at age 14 and continuing to age 18, courts also can:

- » *Provide client-directed legal advocacy based on the young person’s expressed desires and needs*, recognizing their growing their levels of autonomy and need to exercise increasing levels of responsibility for decisions that directly affect them.

Under **New Mexico** law, when a youth in foster care with a GAL reaches age 14, the child’s GAL must file either a notice of continued representation as attorney for the child or a motion to request the appointment of a different attorney for the child. At the child’s first appearance in court after turning 14, the court must inquire as to whether the child is represented by an attorney and appoint one if not. The court must appoint a different attorney if the youth requests different counsel, the GAL requests removal, or the court determines that appointment of a different attorney is appropriate. The requirement to appoint counsel is mandatory rather than discretionary. References to age are to actual age, not mental age. A child’s mental age is not a factor in determining whether or not to appoint a separate attorney. Only an attorney with appropriate experience may be appointed as a youth attorney.

- » *Require by policy and court rules that young people in foster care ages 14 and older have meaningful opportunities to attend and actively participate in their court proceedings* where their voices can be heard on matters impacting them in the present and the future.

New York State’s Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children developed *Tools for Engaging Children in their Court Proceedings: A Guide for Judges, Advocates and Child Welfare Professionals* (2008) to promote young people’s active participation in their court hearings.

Specifically for young people ages 18 to at least age 21 who are eligible for extended voluntary care, states can:

- » *Ensure accountability through well-designed oversight venues* that recognize the developmental strengths and needs of young people with respect to services, supports, and supervision; the responsibilities of both the young person **and** the foster care system while the young person is in extended care; and the outcomes that are to be achieved for each young person. The venue may be the court or an administrative body.

- When the court is the selected oversight venue, develop court rules and protocols that are youth-friendly and non-adversarial and promote collaboration among the parties working with the young person.
- When an administrative body is the selected oversight venue, create an expedited appeal process for judicial review and assistance of legal counsel in matters related to eligibility, findings of non-compliance, expulsion from extended care and denials of re-entry into care.

**Michigan’s Young Adult Voluntary Foster Care Act** provides extended benefits for young people in foster care to age 21. The court determines the appropriateness of the extended care agreement and makes a best interest determination. Once the court has determined the appropriateness of the agreement and made a best interest determination, the court terminates jurisdiction and closes the case.

By policy, **Virginia** requires *Local Supervisory Reviews* for young people age 18 and over who continue to receive foster care and independent living services. These reviews are held every six months. Court hearings are not required for these young people.



- » *Develop intermediate and graduated interventions to ensure that young people at risk of expulsion from foster care are first provided with supports and services that target situational challenges and unforeseen crises.* The oversight venue (whether court or an administrative body) should respond to a young person's non-compliance in a measured and appropriate manner. Intermediate and graduated interventions should be attempted before involuntarily removing a young person from foster care. Intermediate steps should include reviewing the content of the extended care agreement to ensure that it is efficacious, reasonable, and relevant. The parties should also explore whether accommodations and additional supports would make compliance more achievable. Expulsion from foster care should be a consequence of last resort, reserved for circumstances of protracted and substantial breaks of the extended care agreement. Any ultimate decision to expel a young person from extended care should be made at a hearing in which the young person is adequately represented.
- » *Create client-friendly procedures and easy-to-use forms for young adults* who have exited from foster care and wish to petition the court or agency for expedited re-entry into extended care.

**Los Angeles County** has developed procedures and forms to facilitate the re-entry of young people into extended care ([http://file.lacounty.gov/dcms/cms1\\_186747.pdf](http://file.lacounty.gov/dcms/cms1_186747.pdf)).

These strategies are described in greater detail in an upcoming Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Issue Brief, *Re-examining the Foster Care Review Process: Extended Foster Care as a Catalyst for Improved Practices and Better Outcomes*.



# Conclusion

The three interrelated policy and practice goals of *Success Beyond 18* provide a framework for states, tribes and other jurisdictions to take concrete steps to meet the needs of young people beginning at age 14 and continuing until at least age 21 through a transformed system of developmentally appropriate foster care services and supports. We can maximize existing policy and practice options and go beyond what exists by extending care for young people beyond age 18 to at least age 21 by ensuring services and supports are offered based on the unique developmental tasks of this life stage and their legal status as adults; fully promoting the engagement and leadership in case planning and decision-making of all young people in foster care age 14 and older; and providing quality oversight that ensures that developmentally appropriate supports and services lead to positive life outcomes for all young people in foster care, beginning no later than age 14 and continuing through extended voluntary care to at least age 21.

Now is the time . . . and now is the time to do it right.

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*“One of the most valuable lessons I have learned since aging out of foster care is how to build and form healthy relationships that will last.*

*This is a significant lesson for youth aging out of foster care because we are unfortunately at times crippled with the idea that everything is temporary and comes with an ‘aging out’ date.”*

*– Eddye Vanderkwaak*

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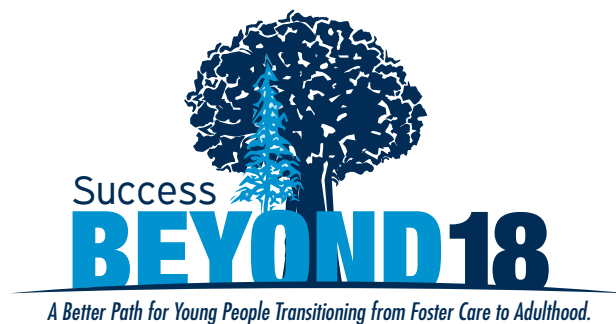
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## About the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

The mission of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative is to ensure that young people – primarily those between ages 14 and 25 – make successful transitions from foster care to adulthood. We do this by working nationally, in states, and locally to improve policies and practices, promote youth engagement, apply evaluation and research, and create community partnerships. Our work creates opportunities for young people to achieve positive outcomes in permanence, education, employment, housing, health, financial capability, and social capital.



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