

SAMPLE POLICY AGENDA: ADVANCING OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

This sample policy agenda is an educational resource created for the Elevating Youth Engagement curriculum and compiled from a variety of sources for the purpose of training. It should not be interpreted as an actual policy campaign. As with all handouts in the Elevating Youth Engagement curriculum, the contents are fact-based but do not reflect the views of the Foundation, its Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative® or its network site partners.

WHAT IS A POLICY AGENDA?

A policy agenda is a clear, strategic outline of issues that impact people or communities and need attention by policymakers. A policy agenda includes specific policy solutions proposed to address these issues. Policy agendas are tools used by advocates to inform decision makers, influence legislation or administrative policies, and focus stakeholder attention on needed change.

Policy Recommendations

Strengthen Permanency Supports

- Require that permanency planning includes youth voice in all decisions starting at age 14.
- Mandate regular, developmentally appropriate conversations between caseworkers and youth about permanency goals, including adoption, guardianship and connections with kin or chosen family.

Protect and Expand Sibling Visitation Rights

- Enforce bimonthly (twice per month) sibling visitation as a legal right unless restricted by court order.
- Require that sibling separation is reviewed quarterly and documented with a written plan to support regular, meaningful contact.

Increase Educational Stability and Success

- Guarantee access to school transportation when youth are placed outside of their home school district.
- Require dedicated education liaisons in child welfare offices to support high school completion, enrollment in postsecondary education and access to scholarships or tuition waivers.

Expand Workforce Development and Employment Support

- Fund year-round paid internship programs for youth in foster care starting at age 16.
- Require child welfare agencies to partner with workforce agencies and local employers to provide job training and career readiness coaching for older youth (ages 16 to 21) in foster care.

Improve Access to Life Skills and Independent Living Services*

- Require that all youth ages 14 and older receive an annual life skills assessment and individualized transition plan.
- Increase funding for workshops, financial literacy programs and peer-led mentoring in key areas such as housing, personal budgeting, transportation and health care navigation.

Ensure Access to Trauma-Informed Mental Health Services

- Require access to culturally responsive, trauma-informed mental health care for all youth in foster care, including aftercare services up to age 26.
- Eliminate waiting lists for services by investing in provider recruitment and telehealth options for rural or underserved areas.

**Accompanying this sample policy agenda is a fact sheet that shows how a policy recommendation can be developed more fully with data, key messages and other details. Use the fact sheet as a resource as you answer questions in the Name It, Claim It exercise. For the exercise, the policy recommendation chosen from above is "Improve Access to Life Skills and Independent Living Services."*

SAMPLE FACT SHEET

Improve Access to Life Skills and Independent Living Services

Why It Matters

Young people in foster care too often transition to adulthood without the consistent guidance, resources or support networks that can help them thrive. Life skills and independent living services — such as financial literacy training, access to health care and help with finding and paying for housing — are essential for their long-term stability and well-being.

Key Facts: Data From Fostering Youth Transitions 2023**

- **Transition services provided by child welfare agencies:** Between 2013 and 2021, fewer than half of eligible youth received federally funded independent living services. In 2021, the percentage was just 23%.
- **Inconsistent service delivery across states:** Access to life skills programs and transition services varies significantly by state and jurisdiction. Some young people receive robust support while others receive none.
- **Barriers to engagement:** Young people often don't know they are eligible for services, or they don't trust the systems offering them. Major barriers include limited outreach by agencies and a lack of programming tailored for different youth populations.
- **Critical needs:** Youth consistently express a need for support in budgeting, finding stable housing, receiving preparation for employment and managing physical and mental health. Data show systems can do more to deliver these types of services.

The time is now for possible solutions, based on the data:

- **Mandate annual life skills planning:** Require all youth ages 14 and older to receive an annual life skills assessment and a personalized transition plan.
- **Expand peer- and community-based services and programs:** Fund and scale programs that offer youth-led or community-based life skills training in areas such as financial education, transportation and tenant rights.
- **Improve outreach and awareness:** Ensure youth know what services are available to them through outreach and communications efforts tailored for the older youth populations served by the child welfare agencies.
- **Standardize and track service delivery:** Implement state-level standards for independent living services, with public reporting on participation and outcomes to ensure accountability.

Youth Voice

"Some of us didn't even know we were supposed to get help with things like bank accounts or jobs until after we aged out. By then, it was too late." — Youth advocate

Conclusion

Improving access to life skills and independent living services is not optional — it is essential to ensure that young people leaving foster care have the tools to navigate adulthood safely and successfully. Investments in these services reduce homelessness, unemployment and justice system involvement for older youth formerly in foster care.



DATA RESOURCE: *Fostering Youth Transitions 2023: State and National Data to Drive Foster Care Advocacy*

This brief examines the experiences of teenagers and young adults in foster care as reported by all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. It analyzes data from the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System and the National Youth in Transition Database. A data profile is provided for each jurisdiction. Find the brief and state profiles at <https://www.aecf.org/resources/fostering-youth-transitions-2023>.

**As you complete the Name It, Claim It exercise, you may wish to look up data for your state.