



The Opportunity Passport: A Pathway to Economic Security for Youth in Foster Care

About the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative works to ensure that young people — ages 14 to 26 in the U.S. who have spent at least one day in foster care after their 14th birthday — have the resources, relationships and opportunities to achieve well-being and success. The Jim Casey Initiative does this by creating opportunities for young people to form permanent family connections and achieve positive outcomes in education, employment, housing, health, financial capability and social capital. It works at the local, state and national levels to improve systemwide policies and practices, promote youth engagement, create community partnerships and use research and evaluation to continually refine and improve strategies.

The Opportunity Passport™: A Promising Approach for Youth in Foster Care

It is critical to find creative strategies that help young people break the cycle and build pathways out of poverty. One of the Jim Casey Initiative's most promising interventions is the Opportunity Passport, which helps build the financial capability of young people in foster care to ensure they know how to earn, spend and save as they transition into adulthood.

The Opportunity Passport is a matched-savings program that provides young people with financial literacy training, a bank account and the ability to match their savings to purchase assets. Young people work with trusted adults in their communities to build savings and make purchases — such as cars, books for school and initial housing-related costs — to help achieve their goals. The program gives them the developmental experience of managing money and making sound spending decisions — skills that are key to their economic success and that they may not otherwise get while in foster care. Many young people report that the decision-making process they learn through the Opportunity Passport program — which requires them to research, weigh pros and cons, and consult with trusted adults about the options available to them — informs other key aspects of their lives, such as choosing a school, career and friends.

During the past 15 years, more than 3,800 Opportunity Passport participants have saved over \$5,750,000 and bought 8,748 assets. Participant savings and match funds for these purchases totaled over \$13 million. The most common asset purchase is a car, followed by housing (e.g., initial rent deposit on an apartment) and education-related expenses. Furthermore, data encouragingly confirm that many young people with the greatest challenges — including young parents and those with at least four group placements — are purchasing assets at rates comparable to other young people in foster care.

Simply put, the Opportunity Passport works. Data show that participants are more likely to report being in school — in large part because they have been able to secure reliable transportation — they are more likely to have a job and more likely to have stable housing.

Growing Number of States Using Public Dollars for the Opportunity Passport

Jim Casey Initiative sites have historically relied on private funding to support the match dollars for the Opportunity Passport. But a growing number of states are dedicating state funding and a portion of their federal Chafee foster care independence dollars to the match pool, enabling them to offer more young people the ability to match for assets. States using public dollars for the matched-savings account include Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Rhode Island and Tennessee. Maryland legislators recently appropriated \$1.7 million for a Foster Youth Savings Program that includes a matched-savings account component. The increasing number of states using public dollars for matched-savings accounts for youth in foster care is a promising sign that they see the value of this approach.

Jim Casey Initiative Opportunity Passport participants who purchase...



Scaling the Opportunity Passport: Public-Private Partnerships as Key to Success

Young people who have experienced foster care are less likely to finish high school or become employed and more likely to experience homelessness or early parenting than their peers who haven't been in foster care. These negative outcomes have a tremendous financial cost in that they lead to greater dependence on government programs, lack of financial contribution to communities, and greater likelihood of perpetuating intergenerational cycles of poverty and foster care involvement. Closing the gaps in outcomes between young people who age out of foster care and their peers in the general population would reduce costs to society by \$7.8 billion dollars¹ in a single year.

The Jim Casey Initiative's vision is that every young person who has experienced foster care has access to an Opportunity Passport. To achieve this requires more states, along with the federal government, to deploy new and existing funds to support this approach. Governors, legislators, advocates and private foundations can be critical partners in helping to ensure young people have the financial capability skills needed for success and well-being.

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¹ Issue Brief: Cost Avoidance The Business Case for Investing In Youth Aging Out of Foster Care, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, May 2013.