



# **BUILDING STRONGER BRIDGES**

## **INTO ADULthood FOR TRANSITION-AGED FOSTER YOUTH**

*A glance into the challenges and opportunities for the federal government  
to better support young adults transitioning from foster care*

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Adolescence is not an easy time in any person's life. High rates of physical, emotional, and cognitive growth combined with the social pressures that come from school, social media, and emerging adulthood make it a challenging time for all youth, but even more so for those youth who lack the financial resources and stable relationships that help youth navigate these difficult years.

Nearly twenty five years ago, Congress invested in programs aimed at assisting youth in foster care in making a successful transition from adolescence to adulthood. In the decades since, continued efforts have been made to learn more about what these young people need and how state and local leaders can step up to meet those needs. The following report attempts to paint a picture of what we know about transition-age foster youth, the funding streams and related programs that serve them, and the opportunities federal policymakers have to improve upon them.

Research in this area has led to a few general conclusions. First, transition-age foster youth are a diverse population with unique needs and programming opportunities and case management styles need to support a more individualized approach. Secondly, more needs to be done to address the psychological and emotional health and well-being of these youth. Finally, efforts to connect these young people to supportive, nurturing relationships with adults must continue.

It is important to say up front that there is still a lot we do not know about these youth and the impact these programs are having on the youth they are intended to serve. Researchers are eager to answer key questions such as: which risk and protective factors are particularly important contributors to key outcomes for young people in foster care and what are the hallmarks of an effective intervention and how might they be replicated on a wide scale? Closing these gaps in knowledge are a key first step in bringing about change.

# TRANSITION

# LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

## 1986

Congress amends Title IV-E of the Social Security Act to include \$45 million in funding for services to youth age 16 or older making the transition from foster care to adulthood. States are given broad flexibility to design outreach programs to attract eligible youth, life skills training, education and employment assistance, counseling, case management, and help youth develop a written transitional independent living plan. At this time, funds are not allowed to be used for room and board.



## 1993

Funding was increased to \$70 million and authorized indefinitely.



## 1999

Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (FCIA), also known as the Chafee Act (Pub. L. No. 106-169), amended Title IV-E to create the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. FCIA doubled federal funding to \$140 million a year, allowed states to use up to 30 percent of those funds for room and board, enabled states to assist young adults ages 18 to 21 who have left foster care, and permitted states to extend Medicaid eligibility to former foster youth up to age 21.<sup>1</sup>



## 2001

Congress authorizes \$60 million annually for Education and Training Vouchers (ETV). Youth are eligible to receive up to \$5,000 a year until they are 23.



## 2008

Fostering Connections to Success Act requires states to develop detailed transition plans for all transition age youth 90 days before they exit care and gives states the discretion to extend eligibility for Title IV-E payments to age 21.



## 2014

Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (Pub.L. No. 113-183) increases funding for Chafee to \$143 million and adds a purpose area about supporting activities that are developmentally appropriate.



## 2018

Family First Prevention Services Act increases maximum age for receipt of Independent Living services to 23 and 26 for receipt of an Education Training Voucher (ETV).



## 2020

The Supporting Foster Youth Through the Pandemic Act prohibits states from aging out youth, allows youth who would have aged out to voluntarily remain or reenter care, and allows states to use Chafee funds to pay for these extensions. In addition, the age for Chafee eligibility is raised to 27; funds can be used for room and board; and allows states option to provide up to \$4,000 in transportation assistance.





# Who are transition-age foster youth?

**Transition-age foster youth (TAY) are young people between the ages of 14–26 who are in or transitioning out of the foster care system and into adulthood.**<sup>2</sup>

According to Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), approximately 111,230 youth ages 13 through 20 were in foster care on the last day of fiscal year 2021. In the same year, one out of every four youth entering care were between 13 and 20 years old.

According to the data from the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), “...compared to youth who exited care prior to age 17, NYTD youth had slightly more placement changes, were more likely to have been placed in a group home or institution, and were more likely to have entered care with a reason for removal that included child behavior problem or caretaker inability to cope.”<sup>3</sup>

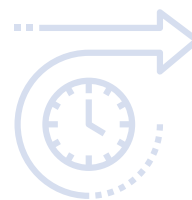
What’s more, 19 and 21 year olds still in care fared better overall than their counterparts who had exited care. “In-care youth were less likely to report that they had been incarcerated for allegedly committing a crime, less likely to have given birth to or fathered a child, and half as likely to have been homeless at some point within the two years prior to completing the survey.” Youth who were in care were also more likely to be in school.<sup>4</sup>



ONE out of FOUR people  
in foster care are  
transition-age youth.



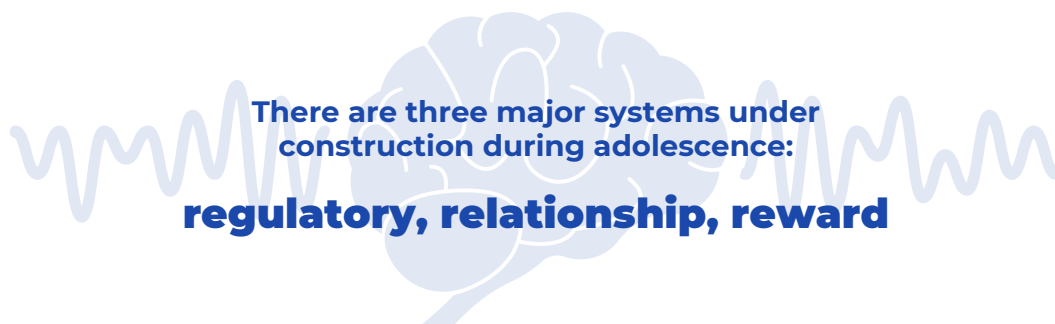
**FOUR** out of **TEN**  
NYTD youth reported having at  
least one disability, with  
emotional disturbance being the  
most common.<sup>5</sup>



NYTD youth are **4x** more  
likely to stay 48 months or  
longer in care.

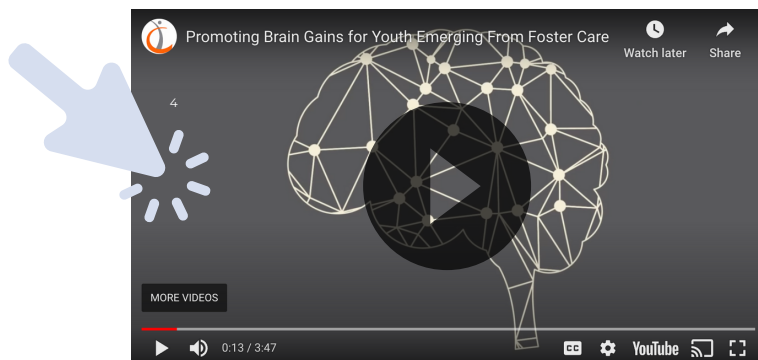
# Why are supports so important for transition-age foster youth?

The human brain experiences a major period of growth and development between the ages of 14-25.<sup>6</sup> This period shapes a person's coping, decision-making, judgment, and planning skills.<sup>7</sup> Research shows that experience, and in particular experience within relationships have a big impact on the developing brain. Furthermore, during this period the chemical changes in the brain that prime adolescents for risk-taking are creating the capacity young people need to practice adult roles and responsibilities while in a supported environment.



Youth in care's early life experiences do not alter their need to have age appropriate support along their journey to adulthood. If anything, providing these youth with opportunities to foster healthy relationships, take risks, make important decisions, and accept new responsibilities will help their brain to heal from these earlier traumas. Brain science is very clear. Young people must take on distinct special and developmental tasks in order to become healthy and productive adults. Yet, youth in foster care are too often prevented from taking on these tasks and cut off from the relationships that are essential to their growth.

[Click here to watch a short video from the Annie E. Casey Foundation on promoting brain gains for youth emerging from foster care:](#)<sup>8</sup>



**The human brain experiences a major period of growth and development between the ages of 14-25. This period shapes a person's coping, decision making, judgment, and planning skills.**

# What are the federal programs serving transition-age foster youth?

The federal government has various programs offered for young people transitioning from out-of-home care into a successful adulthood:<sup>9</sup>



①

## Extended foster care

States and tribes may elect to receive partial federal reimbursement for the cost of **extending foster care up to age 19, 20, or 21** who are Title IV-E eligible and (1) completing high school or an equivalent credential; (2) enrolled in a post-secondary or vocational institution; (3) participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employment; or (4) employed at least 80 hours per month. States and tribes may also seek reimbursement for older youth's foster care if the youth has a documented medical condition which makes them incapable of participating in the above activities.

②

## John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program

States and tribes receive formula grants for **services to assist youth in making a successful transition from foster care to adulthood**. The program is available to youth ages 14-21 in foster care, youth ages 18-21 who aged out of care (or up to age 23 in states that extend foster care to age 21), and youth up to age 21 who left care at 16 or older for kinship guardianship or adoption.

③

## Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program

States and tribes receive formula grant funding of post-secondary **education and training vouchers (ETVs)** to cover the cost of full- or part-time **attendance at an institution of higher education**. Students can receive up to \$5,000 annually until age 26 for up to five years, consecutive or not.

## Federal requirements for funding:



- **Case plan and permanency plan:** The state's written case plan for youth age 14 and older must include a description of the programs and services that will help them prepare for the transition to a successful adulthood and a document listing certain rights regarding education, health, visitation and court participation, certain identification documents, and the right to be safe and avoid exploitation. The youth must be consulted about the development of, and any revisions to, these plans.
- **Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA):** No child under the age of 16 may have a permanency plan of another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA). If a youth is assigned a permanency plan of APPLA, the state must meet additional requirements for the youth as part of the youth's annual permanency hearing and, separately, as part of the periodic review (every six months) of a youth's status in care.
- **Essential documents:** The state must provide a youth age 14 or older with their credit report on an annual basis and free of charge. The state must review and update the education and health care records for each youth in care and supply these records to the youth at no cost when the youth leaves foster care.
- **Transition plan:** For children who are within 90 days of aging out of care, the state must develop a transition plan that is directed by the youth and includes specific options on housing, health insurance, education, local opportunities for mentors, workforce supports, and employment services.

# What are types of services for transition-age foster youth?

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee) pays for thirteen types of services (brief descriptions below).<sup>10</sup> These include services that are provided directly by local child welfare agency staff or an agent of the state (e.g., group home workers, foster parents) or by entities that are contracted by the Independent Living Program (ILP) agency to provide services (e.g., a local nonprofit).<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that states use different procedures for collecting data on services provided and so services that are captured as Chafee services may not be exclusively funded with Chafee dollars. They may be funded by state, private, or a mix of various funding (state and federal). Similarly, a youth may be receiving a service but fail to report it because they not appreciate that it is a transition service.

Category	Description
Academic support	Intended to help youth to complete a high school credential such as academic counseling, GED prep, tutoring, assistance with homework, study skills training, literacy training, and accessing educational resources.
Postsecondary education support	Intended to help youth enter and complete postsecondary education or training such as SAT/ACT test prep, college counseling, information about financial aid and scholarships, assistance with completing college and financial aid applications, and college tutoring.
Career preparation	Intended to develop a youth's ability to apply for, obtain, and maintain employment such as vocational and career assessment, job search and job placement support, retention support, learning how to work with bosses and coworkers, workplace skills, and customer relations skills.
Budget and financial management	Intended to provide training and practice in living within a budget; opening and using checking and savings accounts; developing consumer awareness and smart shopping skills; accessing information about credit, loans, and taxes; and completing tax forms.
Housing education and home management training	Housing education includes assistance and training in locating and maintaining housing, completing rental agreements, handling security deposits and utility expenses, understanding practices to keeping a safe and healthy living space, understanding tenant's rights and responsibilities, and dealing with landlord complaints. Home management training includes instruction in daily tasks such as grocery shopping, meal preparation, laundry, housekeeping, maintenance and minor repairs, and living cooperatively.
Family support and healthy marriage education	Includes information on safe and stable families, healthy marriages, spousal communication, parenting and childcare skills, and domestic and family violence prevention.
Mentoring	Youth are matched with a screened and trained adult for a one-on-one relationship involving regular meetings. Mentorship could be short-term or long-term. This includes mentoring arrangements that are facilitated, paid for, or provided by the state agency or staff, and does not include connections to adult role models through school, work, or family.

# What are types of services for transition-age foster youth? (CONTINUED)<sup>12</sup>

Category	Description
Employment programs or vocational training	Intended to build skills for a specific trade, vocation, or career through classes or on-site training. Employment programs include activities such as apprenticeships, internships or summer employment programs. Vocational training includes activities such as vocational or trade programs and participation in occupational classes (e.g., auto mechanics, computer technology, cosmetology, nursing).
Supervised independent living placements	Youth is living independently in a supervised arrangement that is paid for or provided by the state agency. Youth are provided with increased independence and responsibilities (e.g., signing leases, paying bills, and working with the landlord) under the supervision of an adult.
Room and board financial assistance	Includes financial assistance paid for or provided by the State agency for room and board, including rent deposits, utilities, and other household start-up expenses.
Education financial assistance	A payment that is paid for or provided by the state agency for education or training, such as allowances to purchase textbooks, uniforms, computers, or other educational supplies; tuition assistance; scholarships; payment for educational preparation and support services (e.g., tutoring); and payment for GED and other tests. This category includes receipt of education and training vouchers (ETVs).
Health education and risk prevention	Providing information about hygiene, nutrition, fitness and exercise, first aid; management of medical and dental care (e.g., maintaining personal records, insurance); sex education, abstinence education, and sexually-transmitted disease education; alcohol and substance abuse preventative information (e.g., understanding the consequences of substance abuse), and substance avoidance and intervention. Note: does not include receipt of direct medical care of substance abuse treatment.
Other financial assistance	Any other payments that are paid for or provided by the State agency to help the youth live independently.

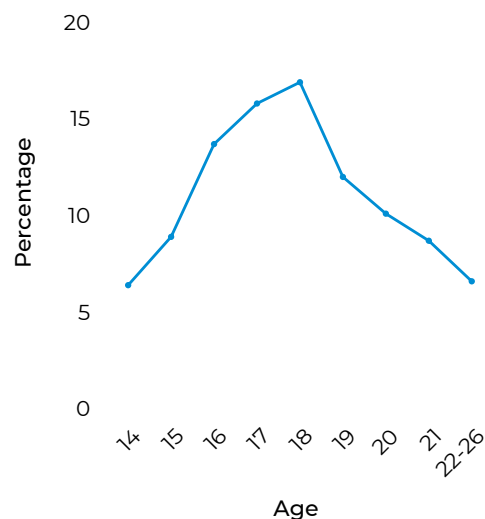
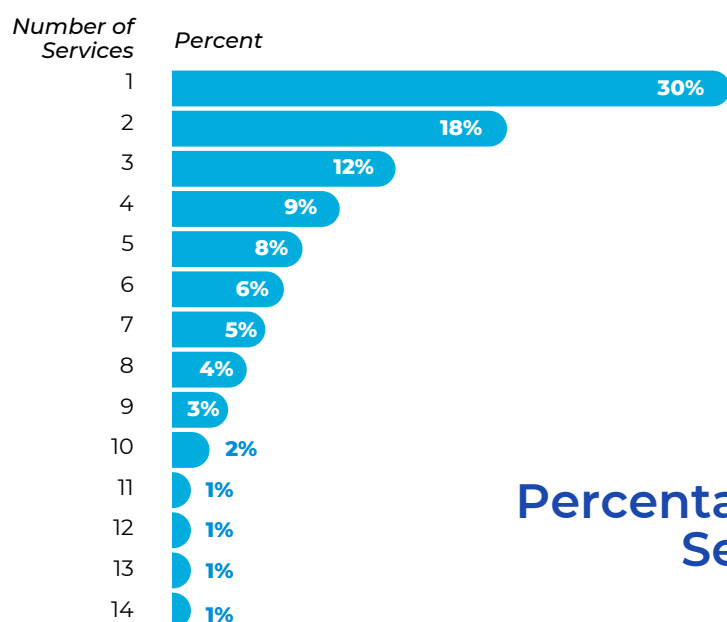


# What do we know about existing services for transition-age foster youth?

According to the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), 109,405 youth were provided with Independent Living Program (ILP) services in Fiscal Year 2021.<sup>13</sup>

## Percentage of the Total Number of Youth Receiving Services By Age<sup>14</sup>

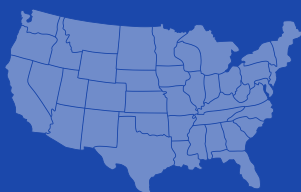
## Percentage of Services Received<sup>15</sup>



## Percentage of Youth Receiving Each Service (of total youth served)<sup>16</sup>

Independent Living Service	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Independent Living Needs Assessment	44%	44%	45%	46%	42%
Academic Support	46%	47%	46%	45%	39%
Post-Secondary Educational Support	24%	23%	23%	23%	19%
Career Preparation	36%	36%	35%	34%	31%
Employment Program or Vocational Training	21%	20%	20%	19%	17%
Budget & Financial Management	39%	37%	37%	37%	35%
Housing Education & Home Management	38%	37%	35%	36%	33%
Health Education & Risk Prevention	38%	38%	36%	39%	36%
Family Support and Healthy Marriage Education	29%	29%	29%	30%	26%
Mentoring	18%	19%	18%	18%	16%
Supervised Independent Living	11%	11%	12%	12%	11%
Room & Board Financial Assistance	13%	13%	13%	12%	15%
Education Financial Assistance	17%	18%	17%	17%	15%
Other Financial Assistance	28%	29%	29%	27%	33%
<b>Total Served</b>	<b>111,614</b>	<b>111,880</b>	<b>110,216</b>	<b>106,912</b>	<b>109,405</b>

Click here to  
find data on  
your state



# What are the outcomes?

Despite small gains over the last decade, former foster youth are less likely than their peers in the general population to be enrolled in education after high school, employed, and stably housed. At the same time, they are more likely than their peers to parent a child or be involved in the criminal justice system. It is important to note that National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) data below is obtained through youth surveys which often have poor response rates, meaning the well-being of those at greatest risk may not be captured.

## YOUTH OUTCOMES AT AGES 17, 19, AND 21<sup>17</sup>

OUTCOMES	Age 17 in Care (n=16,480)	Age 19 in Care (n=3,550)	Age 19 Not in Care (n=5,348)	Age 21 in Care (n=1,399)	Age 21 Not in Care (n=6,400)
Employed Full-Time	2%	15%	17%	35%	33%
Employed Part-Time	13%	29%	25%	32%	25%
Employment-related Skills	20%	32%	29%	37%	31%
Social Security	12%	11%	12%	8%	11%
Educational Aid	3%	30%	17%	31%	16%
Receiving Public Assistance (Food, Housing, or Financial)	N/A	N/A	30%	N/A	31%
Other Financial Support	8%	17%	12%	18%	9%
High School Degree or GED	5%	60%	53%	77%	68%
Attending School	93%	66%	43%	43%	23%
Referred for Substance Abuse Treatment	27% (In Lifetime)	11% (In Past 2 Years)	15% (In Past 2 Years)	6% (In Past 2 Years)	11% (In Past 2 Years)
Incarcerated	33% (In Lifetime)	11% (In Past 2 Years)	25% (In Past 2 Years)	7% (In Past 2 Years)	23% (In Past 2 Years)
Given Birth to or Fathered a Child	5% (In Lifetime)	8% (In Past 2 Years)	11% (In Past 2 Years)	14% (In Past 2 Years)	24% (In Past 2 Years)
Homelessness	17% (In Lifetime)	11% (In Past 2 Years)	26% (In Past 2 Years)	15% (In Past 2 Years)	30% (In Past 2 Years)
Connection to an Adult	93%	92%	88%	93%	85%
Medicaid	85%	89%	69%	90%	64%
Other Health Insurance	15%	13%	17%	13%	18%



# What are lessons learned?

While significant effort has been put into learning more about the needs of transition-age foster youth and the interventions designed to help them successfully navigate the transition from youth to adulthood, significant knowledge gaps remain. Among the many challenges facing those tasked with conducting this research is the small number of youth served by individual programs and the high level of variability in program design. The following are examples of programs that have not only been evaluated but have shown promise.

## Youth Villages LifeSet™

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LifeSet™, a program of Youth Villages, is an individualized, evidence informed, intensive case management model that pairs a highly trained specialist with each young person to help identify and accomplish goals. Begun in 1999, LifeSet has helped more than 20,000 young people become successful adults across the country. In a randomized trial, LifeSet showed positive impacts in many areas of participants' lives, including reduced homelessness, increased economic well-being and better mental health.<sup>18</sup>



\*This graphic is adapted from a Youth Villages publication. Further, these results are extracted from from a large randomized controlled trial conducted by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. View the [full MDRC report](#).

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## Massachusetts Adolescent Outreach Program for Youths in Intensive Foster Care (Outreach)

The Outreach program is a voluntary service that assists teenage foster youth in preparing to live independently and to achieve permanency after exiting the Department of Children and Families (DCF) care. Youths are paired with an Outreach worker who works closely with them to achieve their goals. The Outreach program seeks to achieve a range of outcomes, including receiving a high school diploma, continuing education, avoiding non-marital childbirth, avoiding high-risk behaviors, avoiding incarceration, gaining employment, attaining self-sufficiency, and avoiding homelessness. Program services are based on a youth development model and are individualized for each youth served. Outreach workers may help youth with a variety of tasks including obtaining their driver's license, applying for college, and gaining employment.<sup>20</sup>

## My Life for Transition Age Youth (ML-TAY)

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The My Life Self-Determination Model (MLM) is an intensive youth coaching intervention to increase youth-directed engagement in transitional services and systems, including foster care, mental health, and post-secondary education. In the MLM, youth are supported to identify and pursue transition goals that they prioritize as most important, and in the context of activities to pursue their goals, they learn and apply key self-determination skills relating to achievement (e.g., decision-making), building allies (e.g., negotiation), and self-regulation (e.g., managing stress). Over the course of 9-12 months, young people meet weekly or bi-weekly with their coaches in a community-based setting. Young people also participate in 4-5 near-peer mentoring workshops co-led by older young adults with similar lived experiences. Workshops focus on topics selected by youth and provide opportunities for learning (scavenger hunt to locate programs on a college campus), sharing experiences and ideas, and engaging in fun community activities.<sup>21</sup>



- **Single contact specialist trained in adolescent development**
- **Individualized goal planning and responsive services**
- **A focus on self-determination**
- **Remain with young person for extended periods of time**

<sup>18</sup> Youth Villages, "LifeSet: The Gift of a Good Start | Youth Villages."

<sup>19</sup> Courtney et al., "Experimental evaluation of transitional living services for system-involved youth."

<sup>20</sup> Courtney et al., "Evaluation of the Massachusetts Adolescent Outreach Program for Youths in Intensive Foster Care."

<sup>21</sup> Research and Training Center for Pathways to Positive Futures, Portland State University, "The My Life Self-Determination Model (MLM)."



# What are the continued challenges?

## FUNDING

In addition to state and private dollars, services and supports provided to transition-age foster youth are supported by at least four major federal funding streams. Interestingly enough, federal funds represent a relative small portion of the overall funds spent serving transition-age foster youth.<sup>22</sup>

FUNDING SOURCE	Title IV-E Foster Care (Title IV-E)	Foster Care Independence Program (Chafee)	Educational Training Voucher (ETV)	Title IV-E Prevention (Family First)
Type	open-ended entitlement	capped mandatory formula grant	discretionary	open-ended entitlement
Fiscal Year 2023 Amount	\$6.0007 billion	\$143 million	\$44 million	\$183 million

Unlike Title IV-E, general Chafee funds are not an open-ended entitlement but rather a mandatory formula grant (based on the number of youth in care) that is currently capped at \$143 million a year. In other words, the more youth there are in care in any given year, the less funds per youth are available to provide Chafee services. Similarly, the amount of funds appropriated each year for Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) is left to the discretion of Congress.<sup>23</sup> In Fiscal Year 2023, Congress provided states \$44 million for ETVs which states report is not enough to provide all eligible and interested youth the full amount authorized.<sup>24</sup> State administrators maintain that current funding levels are insufficient to meet the need, especially in the case of youth who need intensive support.

### The following are important findings related to federal funding for transition-age foster youth:



**The lack of additional funding is one of the stated reasons why states are not opting to extend formal care beyond 18.**<sup>25</sup>

It also explains why many states chose not to extend eligibility for Chafee services to age 23.

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**Outside of Chafee, there are many federal programs that offer assistance to transition-age foster youth (TRIO, WIOA, and FUP), each with their own requirements, eligibility criteria, and applications.**

This can be daunting for young people and their caseworkers to navigate.<sup>26</sup>

**Eligibility criteria results in young people being denied resources they need.**

States have the authority to set eligibility for Chafee services, ETVs, and housing programs. As a result, the design and accessibility to these services varies widely across states. Studies have found that a program’s application process can affect young people’s access to services they’re eligible for.

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**Specified uses of Chafee funds are not broad enough to cover intensive or specialized services needed by some youth.**

For example, youth who want to pursue higher education often have to overcome hurdles associated with the instability of earlier education experiences and the required remediation, tutoring, and other support aren’t covered by existing language. Similarly, services don’t often cover the mental health support needed by youth who entered care as teenagers because of a behavioral issue.<sup>27</sup>

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# What are the continued challenges?

## FUNDING (CONTINUED)

### More important findings related to federal funding for transition-age foster youth:

**Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First) restrictions on federal funding for congregate care have reportedly reduced the number of available placements for youth ages 14 to 17, especially for those in need of intensive or specialized services.<sup>28</sup>**

Youth placed in congregate care are three times more likely to have a mental health diagnosis and six times more likely to have had a child behavior problem cited as the need for their removal.

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**Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) provide financial aid for college but studies show that foster care alumni need other supplemental services to succeed.**

Recent evaluations of the Seita Scholars and CalYOUTH study identified other needs, such as child care, that are obstacles to both entering and continuing education.



**“** In Fiscal Year 2016, approximately 112,000 young people received at least one independent living service from the state agency that administers the Chafee program. In that same year, states were allocated \$138 million under Chafee. Based on these figures, and including the required 20 percent state match, the current Chafee allocation provides, on average, \$1,536 per young person per year, covering both direct service and administrative costs.<sup>29</sup> **”**

**Family First allows states to provide prevention services aimed at reducing the need for formal foster care.<sup>30</sup>**

Yet, to date, there are few programs aimed at addressing the behavioral and parenting issues that cause youth to be placed in care.

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### FUTURE SAVINGS: \$4.1 BILLION<sup>31</sup>

DISPARITY	IMPACT OF DISPARITY ON YOUTH IN CARE	NUMBER IMPACTED BY ELIMINATING DISPARITY	ECONOMIC GAINS AND FUTURE SAVINGS
EDUCATION	Lower rates of high school graduation and reduced lifetime earnings	5,290 young people graduate from high school per year	\$2.17 billion in economic gains
EARLY PARENTHOOD	Higher rates of early parenthood, resulting in loss of income, more medical expenses, and increased likelihood that child will be in care	2,866 fewer women experience early parenthood by age 19	\$295 million in first 15 years of a child's life
HOUSING	More likely to experience homelessness and need access to homeless shelters	4,370 fewer youth experience homelessness by age 21	\$9.6 million on temporary shelter beds
INCARCERATION	Higher rates of juvenile and adult incarceration and recidivism	4,870 fewer youth involved in juvenile justice system by age 21	\$1.6 billion on detention and incarceration

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# What are the continued challenges?

## LOW RATES OF PARTICIPATION

Research shows that when youth have access to extended care and other similar transition services, they achieve better outcomes after leaving care. Despite this, the participation rates for youth in these services remains low.



The following are possible explanations for these low rates of participation:

- Youth are receiving services that are funded by Chafee dollars but are not recognized by the youth as an “independent living” service.

Similarly, youth case workers might be working with youth on age-appropriate activities (e.g., securing housing, education) but not see those as “independent living programs. Since most of the participation data is collected through youth surveys and caseworker reports, the data may be skewed by these misunderstandings.

- Youth are no longer in formal care and so it is difficult to connect them to services.<sup>35</sup>

For example, more than 880,000 young people ages 14 to 26 were temporarily eligible for expanded Chafee services enacted by Congress as part of pandemic relief. Of those young people, however, 85% were no longer in foster care, which made it difficult for states to reach many of those eligible.

- Youth don't find the services worthwhile or helpful so they stop engaging them.<sup>36</sup>

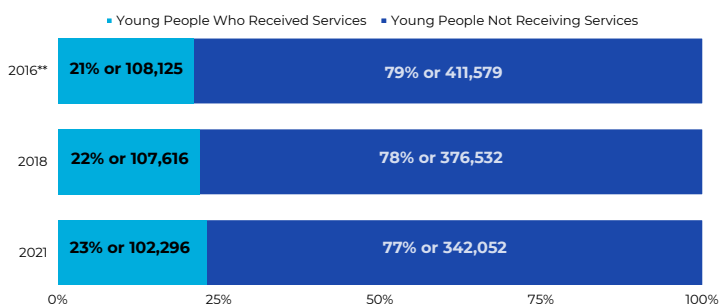
Caseworkers report that many young people do not take full advantage of available services but instead do the minimum required to be eligible to receive financial assistance. Several studies have questioned the impact of classroom-based transition programs, as they tend to be short term and leave little to no room for hands on learning or trial and error.<sup>37</sup> Many have recommended states consider home-based (i.e., train foster parents) or youth directed approaches instead as these would be better aligned with adolescent development.<sup>38</sup>

- There is a mismatch between the youth's needs and the services available locally.

**Did You Know?**

The CalYOUTH study found that among participants with a high school credential, 28% reported that they had received an Education and Training Voucher (ETV), 12% had applied but had not gotten it, over 42% knew of the program but didn't apply, and nearly 18% had never heard of it.<sup>33</sup>

### Transition Services For Young People in Foster Care<sup>34</sup>



\*\*The percent and number of young people receiving services each year is calculated using multiple years of AFCARS data. For example, for 2016 estimates, AFCARS data from 2008-2016 is used to capture the number of young people who were 14-21 years old during these years or the total numbers of young people eligible between the ages of 14-21 at any point while in foster care

# What are the continued challenges?

## WIDE VARIATION OF STATE IMPLEMENTATION



The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee) statute provides broad program purposes for its funds. States are required to submit a plan for how they intend to use federal dollars, but they have great latitude in how they use Chafee funds. As a result, there is **no national standard for service provision** and the **effectiveness of individual interventions and services is not assessed**. Programs are often serving a small number of youth at one time. This makes it difficult to develop the evidence base necessary to improve outcomes.

Making matters more confusing, there is a great deal of **variability** in how states set out **eligibility requirements**. For instance, in California, youth are automatically enrolled in transition services but in Texas, youth are required to seek entry into these programs. Similarly, states have engaged different models for working with these young people. In some states, youth are assigned an independent living worker who is separate from their legal caseworker and in others legal caseworkers are responsible for connecting youth to services.

Finally, states administer their Chafee-funded programs in multiple ways. For example:

- In Maine, the state's independent living coordinator oversees specialized life skills education coordinators assigned to cover all of the state's Department of Health and Human Services district offices.
- In California, each county administers its own program with some oversight and support from a statewide program.
- Florida and Illinois use contracted service providers to administer their programs.<sup>39</sup>

## TIMING

For youth who are not in foster care, **adolescent development and the acquisition of important life skills is something that happens informally and on a regular basis over several years**. In addition, youth are given the chance to form and test these newly found skills within the safety of a relationship with adults, typically a parent or guardian. For youth in care, the process is often more formal, with required attendance in classroom-based life skills sessions. Numerous studies have emphasized **the need for a focus on interdependence**, or relational needs, rather than solely on independent living skills. Instead, they recommended that transition services be offered within a relationship-based framework, as opposed to the current bureaucratic approach which does not connect well with youth.<sup>40</sup>

The Fostering Connections Act (2008) required that states **work with youth during the 90-day period immediately before they leave care to develop a personal transition plan**, including consultation with the youth's caseworker and other supportive adults as appropriate. The plan must be as detailed as the youth desires and should include specific discussion of **housing, health insurance, education, opportunities for mentoring, continuing support services, and employment services**. Another recurring recommendation is to shift the focus away from "transition" services and toward programs that allow youth to **gradually achieve age-appropriate development milestones** throughout their time in care.<sup>41</sup>



# What are the continued challenges?

## CASE MANAGEMENT

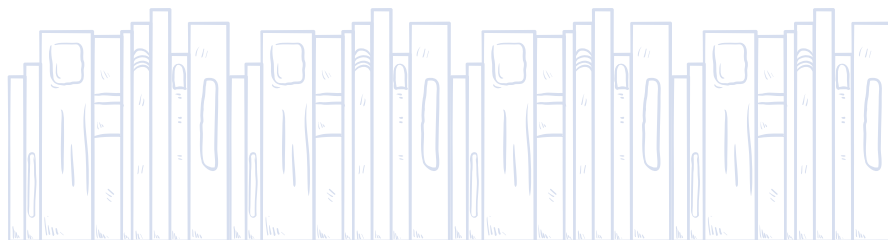
Until 2008, child welfare agencies worked with children ages 0-18 and the main focus of the interactions between the system's caseworkers and youth was ensuring the child's safety, permanence, and well-being. With the passage of Fostering Connections Act of 2008, which raised the age at which a youth could receive Chafee services to 21, and Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First), which increased the age of eligibility to 23 in some states, caseworkers are not only having to support the needs of young adults but they are also being asked to provide support in a wide array of areas related to the transition to adulthood.



This major shift has caused a series of different case management challenges:<sup>42</sup>

- 1 First, it presents an internal challenge as to what is to be the goal — **permanency or independence?**
- 2 Similarly, it presents a conflict for youth who are not sure whether to view the offer of **extended care as a basic right, obligation, or privilege.**
- 3 Finally, the **relationship between a caseworker and client** is very different when the client is a young child versus a young adult (i.e.; young adults can both make their own goals and express their own desires).

In response, some states have begun to shift in favor of specialized case management (e.g., Illinois, Oregon, and Indiana).



# What do we know about the impact of extended care?

Fostering Connections to Success Act gave states the ability to extend formal foster care for eligible children until age 21 and Family First Prevention Services Act allows states with extended foster care to provide Chafee services up to age 23. Eligible students can receive up to \$5,000 in Chafee Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) until age 26. Recent studies indicate that extending care beyond 18 is associated with better outcomes.<sup>43</sup>



**Young adult outcomes for older youth in extended care compared to those not in extended care**<sup>44</sup>

	NYTD Cohort 1, Age 19	NYTD Cohort 1, Age 21
Outcome Domain	Odds	Odds
Having a diploma/GED	1.2x higher	No significant difference
Employment	1.2x higher	1.3x higher
School enrollment	2.8x higher	3x higher
Disconnectedness	2.8x lower	3x lower
Receiving educational aid	1.9x higher	1.4x higher
Homelessness	3.1x lower	2.7x lower
Young parenthood	1.7x lower	2x lower

Results significant at the  $p < .05$

Similarly, an evaluation of the impact of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act on outcomes during the transition to adulthood for foster youth (CalYOUTH) found the following:<sup>45</sup>

## Outcome

## Impact of each additional year of care

### Education

- Increased the probability that youth completed a high school credential by about 8%
- Increased their expected probability of enrolling in college by 5–12%.

### Employment and Earnings

- Increased the number of quarters that youth were employed between their 21st and 23rd birthdays (increased by a little less than half of a quarter for each year in extended care).
- Increased youths' total earnings between their 21st and 23rd birthdays by about \$2,300–\$3,200.
- Increased the amount of money youth had in bank accounts by about \$650.

### Food Security

- Decreased the odds of being food insecure in the past 12 months by about 21%.

### Housing

- Decreased the odds of being homeless or couch-surfing between the ages of 21 and 23 by about 19%. Also decreased the number of times youth had been homeless and the number of days youth had been homeless during that period.

### Relationships

- Increased the odds that youth felt they had enough people to turn to for emotional support, tangible support, and advice/guidance.

### Justice System Involvement

- Decreased the odds that youth had been arrested since their last CalYOUTH interview by about 28%.

<sup>43</sup> Rosenberg and Abbott, "Supporting Older Youth Beyond Age 18: Examining Data and Trends in Extended Foster Care."

<sup>44</sup> ibid

<sup>45</sup> Courtney et al., "Report from CalYOUTH: Findings on the relationship between extended foster care and youth's outcomes at age 23."

# What are some ideas on the table?

## Some of the related legislation introduced in 2023 during the 118th Congress:



### **Foster Youth and Driving Act (H.R. 1446)**

*Introduced by:* Rep. Danny Davis (D-IL)

*Summary:* This bill expands state foster care and adoption assistance programs to provide driving preparation assistance to foster youth and related training for foster parents. The bill further directs assistance to states and tribal organizations for age-appropriate foster youth to, among other things, obtain automobile insurance, complete driver's education, obtain a driver's license, and purchase a vehicle.



### **Housing is a Human Right Act of 2023 (H.R. 1708)**

*Introduced by:* Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-WA)

*Summary:* To address root causes of homelessness, meet the needs of community members experiencing harms from homelessness, transition communities towards providing housing for all, ending penalization of homelessness, and ensure full democratic participation and inclusion of persons experiencing homelessness, and for other purposes.



### **Foster Youth Mentoring Act of 2023 (H.R. 3443)**

*Introduced by:* Rep. Mary Scanlon (D-PA)

*Summary:* To support the establishment or expansion and operation of programs using a network of public and private community entities to provide mentoring for children and youth with experience in foster care.

## The Biden Administration has recommended Chafee funding increase for FY 2024:

The budget proposes **increasing funding** for the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood by \$100 million per year, for a **total of \$243 million per year**.<sup>46</sup> The budget includes several program improvements to provide **greater flexibility, effective services, reduced agency burden**, and **support for youth** who transition out of foster care, and **homelessness prevention**.



The budget allows states to **serve youth up to age 27**, and youth who exited foster care to **adoption or guardianship after age 14** rather than age 16. The budget further adds youth who receive a Foster Youth Initiative or Family Unification Project **housing voucher** as an eligible population. It also **removes the restriction** on the percentage of assistance that may be used for room and board and adds **driving and transportation assistance** as an allowable cost with no cap.



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