



Children's Action Alliance

A Voice for Arizona's Children since 1988

Key Findings in the Arizona Environmental Scan

The challenges faced by youth aging out of foster care to adulthood in Arizona are great. Over the past two decades, Arizona established a myriad of policies and services designed to assist youth with this transition. Although many youth have benefitted, more needs to be done to improve outcomes for young people transitioning to adulthood.

In Arizona, CAA is serving as the lead agency for our state's improvement effort - the Arizona Youth Opportunities Initiative (AYOI). Through focused attention using Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative's five core strategies, the AYOI will work to improve conditions for foster youth in the following outcome areas:

- *Permanence*
- *Education*
- *Employment*
- *Financial Capability*
- *Housing*
- *Physical and Mental Health*
- *Social Capital*

Over the past six months, data and information was compiled for the Arizona Environmental Scan. This comprehensive assessment highlights the current conditions for youth transitioning out of Arizona's foster care system and sets the stage for a three-year Implementation Plan focused on improving outcomes for independence. Arizona's strength and opportunity areas include:

Strength Highlights:

- The Arizona Department of Economic Security, Division of Children, Youth and Families has implemented progressive policies to address supports needed for youth transitioning from foster care, such as the Independent Living Program and Transitional Independent Living Program.
- In 2013, the Arizona Legislature passed SB 1208 - Foster Care Tuition Waiver 5 Year Pilot. The bill provides a tuition waiver at any of the state universities and community colleges for eligible young adults (ages 16 and older) who experienced foster care in Arizona. Additionally, a number of Arizona universities and community colleges offer privately funded, post-secondary education scholarships for youth who have experienced foster care.
- A number of state service organizations offer a range of educational services, workforce development programs and internships designed to support young adults leaving foster care in their career development.

Opportunity Areas:

- More young adults could benefit from support services. Of 648 young adults aging out of Arizona foster care in FFY 2011, 48% exited care within two months after their eighteenth birthday (despite being able to remain in care and receive support services until their 21st birthday).
- Of the nearly 2000 current and former Arizona foster youth (18-21 years old) eligible for the Young Adult Transitional Insurance (YATI) Program under AHCCCS in SFY 2012, only 30% (613) were enrolled in this free health insurance program.

- High caseloads for CPS Specialists and contract provider staff limits time spent with clients and impacts the number of youth that receive essential services.
- Rigid programmatic rules and funding limitations result in youth being disqualified for services before becoming stable and gaining sufficient ground. Strict programmatic rules leave little room for the type of youth risk-taking that is needed to learn and build healthy independence.

Using the knowledge gleaned from the Environmental Scan, the AYOI is moving forward with the creation of a three-year Implementation Plan (2014-2016). The Plan will leverage existing resources to strengthen and grow opportunity areas.

[Click here to read the full Executive Summary and Environmental Scan.](#)