



# Arizona Youth Opportunities Initiative

## Environmental Scan EXECUTIVE SUMMARY October 7, 2013

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## Introduction to the Arizona Youth Opportunities Initiative

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

For the past decade, the national Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative has worked in selected states to improve policies and practices, promote youth engagement, apply evaluation and research, and create community partnerships to ensure that young people make successful transitions from foster care. By creating a range of opportunities for young people in the core work of state child welfare departments and other public agencies, youth are more prepared for successful adulthood.

With the leadership and support of the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, Arizona is poised to become a Jim Casey Initiative site. In an effort to continuously improve and enhance programs and services available to youth transitioning out of Arizona's foster care system, Children's Action Alliance (CAA) is serving as the lead agency for our state's effort - the Arizona Youth Opportunity Initiative. CAA has a longstanding history of more than 25 years working collaboratively with systems of care (e.g. child welfare, education, mental health, juvenile justice, adult services, and labor) to improve the well-being of Arizona's vulnerable children and youth, especially those in the child welfare system. CAA has the capacity, willingness and conviction to work with youth in foster care, alumni of foster care, and public and private agencies.

The first step forward in becoming a Jim Casey Initiative site is determining whether Arizona is ready and prepared to do this work. Over the past six months, key stakeholders representing state and community agencies, service sectors supporting youth, and young people with first-hand experience in foster care have been involved in gathering information for the Environmental Scan. This comprehensive assessment highlights the current conditions for youth transitioning out of Arizona's foster care system, and sets the stage for the next step in the process, a three-year Implementation Plan focused on improving outcomes for youth transitioning from foster care to independence.

The Environmental Scan outline is provided by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and includes Arizona specific information on our Capacity to Plan and Demographics. In addition, Jim Casey's five core strategies were reviewed in consideration of improving outcomes for young people transitioning from foster care. These strategies include: Youth Engagement, Partnerships and Resources, Research, Evaluation and Communication, Public Will and Policy, and Increased Opportunities. Through focused attention on these Jim Casey core strategies, the Arizona Youth Opportunities Initiative is poised to work to improve conditions for youth in the following outcome areas:

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

## Capacity to Plan

Over the past 30 years, Arizona has surpassed many states in our progressive and innovative policies supporting youth transitioning from foster care. Within the child welfare framework, the Arizona Department of Economic Security - Division of Children Youth and Families (ADES -DCYF) provides and or contracts for services to support older youth in foster care and those who have exited foster care. Programs are designed to help youth make a successful transition to adulthood. The major program components are outlined in the following matrix:

ADES-DCYF TRANSITIONING YOUTH PROGRAMS	AGE OF ELIGIBILITY									
	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24 & 25	
<p><b>Independent Living Program (ILP)</b> - Any youth 16 years of age or older, in custody of the ADES, in an out-of-home placement and who will most likely age-out of foster care. Youth is eligible to receive specialized case management services, focusing on independent living and self-sufficiency skills up to age 21. ADES Case Managers provide case supervision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Voluntary Placement Agreement</b> - Youth in the custody of ADES at age 18 may sign a Voluntary Placement Agreement to remain in care. Youth can continue in care up to age 21 if case plan requirements are met.</li> <li><b>Independent Living Subsidy Program (ILSP)</b> - Youth placed in the custody of ADES. If age 17, youth must meet program eligibility and be approved for ILSP by ADES and by the Juvenile Court. Youth age 18 and over must meet program eligibility, but court approval is not required. Youth are eligible up to age 21 and receive a monthly stipend to help cover living costs and expenses and may live in unlicensed housing (e.g. apartment, dormitory, etc.) as long as youth's case plan requirements are met.</li> </ul>	X	X	X	X	X					
	<b>1572 Youth Participants in CY 2012</b>									
				X	X	X				
	<b>602 Youth Participants in FFY 2012</b>									
		X	X	X	X					
<b>451 Youth Participants in FY 2012</b>										
<p><b>Transitional Independent Living Program (TILP)</b> - Former foster youth from any public or Tribal child welfare agency who were in out-of-home placement when age 16, 17, or 18. Youth are eligible to receive specialized case management services in Arizona, through a community contractor (i.e. Arizona's Children Association) focusing on independent living and self-sufficiency skills up to age 21. Some financial support may be available.</p>			X	X	X					
	<b>221 Youth Participants in CY 2012</b>									
<b>Additional Support Services</b>										
<p><b>Education and Training Voucher Program (ETV)</b> - Current and former foster youth from any public or Tribal child welfare agency who were in out-of-home care when age 16, 17, or 18. Youth may be eligible for up to \$5,000 of post-secondary educational assistance up to age 23.</p>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
	<b>309 Youth Participants in SFY 2012</b>									
<p><b>Young Adult Transition Insurance (YATI)</b> - Current and former foster youth in the custody of the ADES and who turn 18 while in Arizona foster care. Youth are eligible for a qualifying AHCCCS health plan regardless of income status up to age 21 (up to age 26 as of 1-1-2014).</p>			X	X	X					
	<b>613 Youth Participants in CY 2012</b>									

**Note:** FFY 2012-Federal Fiscal Year-October 1, 2011-September 30, 2012; CY 2012-Calendar Year 2012-January 1-December 31, 2012; SFY 2012- State Fiscal Year-July 1, 2011-June 30, 2012.

**Source of Data:** Adapted from Arizona Department of Economic Security (ADES-DCYF) *Child and Family Services Annual Progress Report, Section I Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and Education Training Voucher Program, June 2011 and 2012*. Arizona Department of Economic Security (ADES), *Child Welfare Reporting Requirements Semi-Annual Reports –October 1,2011-March 31,2012, p. 34 and April 1, 2012-September 30, 2012*, Email communication from Beverlee Kroll, Permanency and Youth Services Manager, ADES-DCYF 6.21.2013

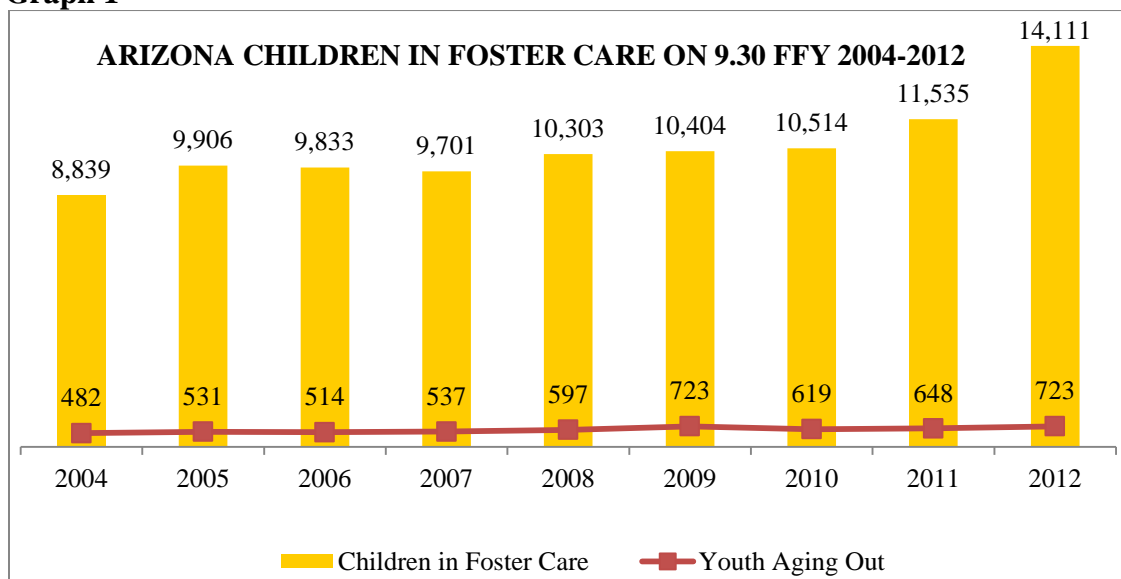
Legislation, policies and program components put in place beginning in 1983 include: establishing specialized case management units within ADES-DCYF to work specifically with youth transitioning from foster care to independence; providing an Independent Living Subsidy Program that allows eligible youth at age 17 to receive monthly funding to transition from a structured living environment such as a licensed foster or group home to an alternative living arrangement such as an apartment or college dormitory; extending voluntary foster care for youth over the age of 18 up to age 21; providing programmatic and limited financial support for youth who have left foster care through the Transitional Independent Living Program; extending AHCCCS health insurance coverage to youth in foster care who turn 18 until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday without regard to income (and up to their 26<sup>st</sup> birthday as of January 2014); and just in this past legislative session of 2013, establishing a five year pilot program that provides a tuition waiver for eligible current and former foster youth who attend state universities or community colleges.

## Demographics

On September 30, 2012, there were 14,111 children in foster care in Arizona, a 44% increase since 2003. Approximately 24% or 3,392 are between the ages of 14-21. This population included 602 youth, ages 18-21 participating in voluntary or extended foster care.

As Graph 1 indicates, the number of older youth exiting Arizona’s foster care to Independent Living continues to rise as well. In FFY 2012, 723 young adults aged 18 and older left care, compared to 428 in 2004. While many services are made available to transitioning youth, the number of youth participating in those programs and their outcomes still raise concern for Arizona.

**Graph 1**



NOTE: Children in Foster Care on 9.30.2012, Youth Aging Out Reflect Number of Youth over 12 month period (FFY 2012).

## Youth Outcomes

In Arizona, the number of youth in foster care has almost doubled in the past decade. Although ADES-DCYF is trying to increase the availability of foster families for older youth, as youth get older while in

foster care, the likelihood of being placed in a family-setting diminishes and the percentage of youth living in congregant care increases steadily. As Chart 1 indicates, in FFY 2012, almost 40% of youth age 14-21 who were in foster care were living in either a group home or residential treatment center.

**Chart 1**

ARIZONA CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE 14 YEARS AND OLDER BY PLACEMENT TYPE ON 9.30.2012								
Age	Relative	Family Foster Home	Group Home	Residential Treatment	Independent Living	Runaway	Trial Home Visit	Total
14	160	163	131	61	0	24	1	540
15	149	203	190	94	0	41	5	682
16	159	196	240	114	3	62	4	778
17	126	183	255	116	9	98	3	790
<b>Total 14-17</b>	594	745	816	385	12	225	13	2790
<b>Percent of Total 14-17</b>	21%	27%	29%	14%	0%	8%	0%	100%
<b>18 &amp; older</b>	27	79	56	88	313	38	1	602
<b>Percent of Total 18 &amp; Older</b>	18%	24%	26%	14%	10%	8%	0%	100%
<b>Total 14&amp; Older</b>	621	824	872	473	325	263	14	3392

**Source of Data:** Arizona Department of Economic Security (ADES) *Child Welfare Reporting Requirements Semi-Annual Report April 1, 2012-September 30, 2012*, p.42.

Despite Arizona having a number of programs and services available to transitioning age youth, youth are not fully engaging in services available. Of the approximate 1,990 youth who exited care from FFY 2010 through 2012 on or after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and could presumably be eligible for services, only 602 youth were in extended care through a Voluntary Placement agreement on September 30th, 2012. Of these youth, 451 were enrolled in the Independent Living Subsidy Program. Similarly, for the Young Adult Transitional Insurance (YATI) program administered through the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), there were only 613 youth enrolled during the course of 2012. Much work is needed to communicate the existing opportunities and expand and support these vulnerable youth.

Current efforts in Arizona and opportunities needed to enhance outcomes for youth leaving foster care are summarized as follows:

### ***1. Permanence***

**Successes:** During FFY 2012, 1,504 children between the ages of 13-17 exited care. Of these, 929 were reunited with family, 206 were adopted, 238 were placed in a permanent family guardianship; while 723 youth aged 18 and older exited foster care without a permanent family to call their own.

Examples of successes to increase permanency for children in foster care include the effort of Casey Family Programs working with ADES-DCYF to assist youth with making legal and permanent connections and placements through Permanency Roundtables which are focused brain-storming sessions. The Roundtables are intended to develop an innovative and realistic plan that improves the permanency status of youth in short time frames.

Through a federal grant that was recently discontinued, the Arizona's Children Association (AzCA) had initiated two interventions; the 3-5-7 Model, which prepares children for life with a new family and focuses on activities that help them work through the grief and loss surrounding biological family; and the Family Finding Model, a method that utilizes tools to locate and contact extended family members to consider as potential resources for youth. While the federal grant project was closed out in January 2013, AzCA continues to work with ADES-DCYF staff to find ways to implement these practices with transitioning youth in Maricopa County.

Following the enactment of federal Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (H.R. 3443 aka the John Chafee Act), CAA working in coordination with ADES, successfully advocated for the passage of legislation in 2000 that implemented components of the new federal law. It eliminated the prohibition of foster care services to youth under 21 who had received a high school diploma or GED. It established the TILP to provide a variety of services. A youth up to age 21 may now receive residential, ILSP and other support services if in the ILSP or in an out-of-home placement under a voluntary placement or a dependency action when turning age 18. A youth up to age 21 may receive a variety of support services if in state custody before turning 18. Court jurisdiction for all dependent and delinquent youth in Arizona ends at age 18. There is no requirement with the passage of this legislation in 2000 that the juvenile court oversee the cases of dependent youth who voluntarily agree to remain in foster care or be in the ILSP beyond the age of 18.

**Enhancement Opportunities:** Youth in Arizona's foster care system are much more likely to be placed in congregant care living placements than with a relative or foster family as they increase in age. In FFY 2012, 1345 or 39.6% of youth age 14 to 21 were either living in a group home or a residential treatment center. Almost 8% or 263 youth were documented as runaways from foster care. In the same year, 723 youth aged out of foster care system in Arizona without achieving permanence.

For youth aging out of care, connections to both formal and informal supports are critical. This could include safe connections with biological family members, including siblings and parents, connections with caring adult allies and mentors, as well as peers. Youth interviewed by the Initiative stressed the need to have frequent contact with their CPS Specialist (CPSS) and access to them via email and phone. Communication with CPSS is vital to decisions such as contact with family members, friends and placements. Youth anxious over placements or decisions regarding what will happen when they reach age 18 wanted more frequent access to their CPSS to discuss housing and placement options. Youth emphasized the importance of biological family and the desire to find and strengthen relationships after they exit care.

Court jurisdiction for all dependent and delinquent youth in Arizona ends at age 18. The 2008 federal Fostering Connection to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (H.R. 6893/P.L. 110-351 allows states to draw down additional federal Title IV-E dollars for extended voluntary foster care or ILSP if there is court or administrative oversight of the case. Arizona should explore the fiscal and programmatic opportunity to draw down these additional resources in support of this population of youth.

## ***2. Education***

**Successes:** Youth transitioning out of Arizona's foster care system have some targeted educational services available to them. Two ADES-DCYF Education Specialists assist CPS Specialists (CPSS) in

meeting the educational needs of youth. They support CPSS in helping youth graduate from high school, pass the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards test, and apply for postsecondary education as well as financial assistance.

Arizona has a number of public and charter high schools options with flexible class schedules, as well as GED programs that may offer students the ability to advance at a pace that works for their unique needs. In Calendar Year 2012, 567 or 62% of eligible youth age 18-21 who opted to remain in foster care and participate in the Independent Living Program completed high school or obtained a GED. In the same year, 385 or 82% of eligible youth participating in the Independent Living Program age 18-21 were either enrolled in or completed a college or trade school program.

Arizona also has a number of privately funded post-secondary scholarship opportunities specifically targeting youth who are aging out of foster care, including but not limited to the Nina Scholars at Arizona State University and Maricopa Community Colleges, Armstrong Family Foundation Scholars at Arizona State University, Blavin Scholars at Northern Arizona University and the Barbara Polk Scholars at Yavapai College. These scholarship programs offer financial assistance as well as wraparound support services that are so critical to each student's on-going success. The number of openings for these scholarship opportunities remains limited, however. Additionally, during SFY 2012, 309 youth received Educational and Training Vouchers of up to \$5,000 that is available from federal funding to ADES for youth who were in foster care at age 16 or older and are attending a post-secondary education program.

The 2013 Arizona Legislature passed legislation (SB 1208) that establishes a five year pilot to provide tuition waivers to youth transitioning from foster care at the three state universities and state-supported community colleges; this legislation became effective on September 13, 2013. The waiver assistance will be available after federal and state tuition assistance grants are applied.

**Enhancement Opportunities:** Youth who have experienced foster care must overcome educational deficits due to missing school days or changing schools frequently. Youth interviewed by the Initiative emphasized the need to address these deficits early on through tutoring and programs such as summer classes and on-line opportunities in order to help prepare them for high school and post-secondary education opportunities.

Additionally, the FosterEd Initiative, developed by the National Center for Youth Law, is being piloted in Pima County, Arizona starting in fall 2013. FosterEd is working to improve the educational outcomes of Arizona foster children. In partnership with state and local agencies, they will implement a continuous cycle of data-driven interventions to ensure every Arizona foster child has at least one educational champion with the characteristics proven to support educational success.

Enhanced communication is identified as an opportunity as there is a general lack of awareness about the ADES-DCYF Education and Training Voucher Program as well as college scholarships for foster youth among attorneys, judges, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) members and foster parents surveyed by the Initiative.

### ***3. Employment***

**Successes:** ADES offers a Youth Program providing job readiness and training services to young people ages 14-21. The main thrust of the Youth Program is to increase the focus on longer-term academic and occupational learning opportunities and provide long-term comprehensive service strategies. Additionally, Jewish Family and Children's Services (JFCS), Tumbleweed Center for Youth

Development, Goodwill AZ, and Job Crops offer a range of programmatic services for at risk youth and youth transitioning out of foster care. Program focus can include literacy skills, education for high school diplomas and General Educational Equivalent Diplomas (GEDs), job training, resume building, paid apprenticeships, case management, job referrals, housing, and guidance and mentorship. Programs target youth and young adults ranging from age 14 to 25.

**Enhancement Opportunities:** There is a general lack of awareness about State and community-based job training and placement programs available to foster youth among attorneys, judges, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), Foster Care Review Board members and foster parents surveyed by the Initiative.

Individuals from agencies working with youth transitioning from foster care in addition to young people interviewed by the Initiative stressed the importance of obtaining personal documents, the difficulty acquiring them and the barriers this can pose. As a prerequisite to employment and school enrollment, young people need to obtain and have in their possession social security cards, birth certificates, immigration documents, school records, court records and other pertinent documents.

Youth also emphasized the need for access to more programs that provide individual assistance with resumes, job applications, and building a network of employers who are willing to hire foster youth and alumni beyond subsidized internships.

#### ***4. Financial Capability***

**Successes:** ADES-DCYF Independent Living and Transitional Independent Living programs provide training on budgeting, finances and building credit. Youth have the opportunity to create budgets and staff can provide support in opening up checking and savings accounts. In youth interviews, they expressed confidence in what they had learned from their training sessions in the areas of budgeting, education, apartment hunting, job applications, and transportation. Youth in the Independent Living Program are provided financial incentives by ADES-DCYF each time they obtain a high school diploma, GED, associate degree, bachelor's degree, or complete a job certificate program. ADES-DCYF also offers a match-saving program where eligible youth can receive up to \$1000 when they exit foster care.

**Enhancement Opportunities:** While ADES-DCYF provides a financial literacy component in the independent living skills training, youth interviewed indicated they had minimal real world experience in actually managing a bank account, credit card or a personal budget. For most youth, moving into their own apartment was their first experience with paying bills, budgeting and banking. There is also a general lack of awareness about the financial incentive programs available to foster youth among attorneys, judges, CASAs, FCRB members and foster parents and adult allies survey by the Initiative. Real world experience for more youth to practice what they learned with support from financial coaches is an opportunity worth exploring and enhancing.

#### ***5. Housing***

**Successes:** ADES offers youth in foster care age 17 and older the option of participating in the Independent Living Subsidy Program (ILSP). Youth may receive a monthly stipend to help cover living



costs and expenses and may live in unlicensed housing (e.g. apartment, dormitory, etc.) as long as the youth's case plan requirements are met. If age 17, youth must meet program eligibility and be approved for ILSP by ADES and by the Juvenile Court. Youth age 18 and over must meet program eligibility, but court approval is not required.

The Housing Arizona Youth Project (HAYP) launched in July 2009 was focused on the housing needs of homeless and at risk youth between the ages of 16 and 25. HYAP was an initiative of the Interagency and Community Council on Homelessness and funded by the Arizona Department of Housing and implemented by the ADES Homeless Coordination Office. The HAYP initiative provided a successful model and housing for 349 youth during the third and final year of funding (SFY 2012).

Youth serving agencies have also demonstrated successful partnerships with local government housing departments to administer Section 8 Vouchers for homeless youth, including youth who are transitioning from foster care. Agencies include One n Ten and Tumbleweed Center For Youth Development.

**Enhancement Opportunities:** Guidelines for the ILSP are complex; implementation regarding program eligibility and compliance is not perceived as consistent by youth or professionals and advocates who work with them. Youth interested in obtaining subsidized or supportive housing often face long waiting lists and a general lack of available units. While some transitional housing programs do exist, the number of available beds is much less than the need and funding for such programs is limited. Additionally, youth who have experienced trauma and homelessness often need, more than the 18-24 months funders allow in a transitional living program to be successful on their own. Youth also face difficulty meeting credit and criminal background requirements, having deposits required for rental units and utilities, and generally lack experience and familiarity with landlord-tenant rights.

## ***6. Physical and Mental Health***

**Successes:** The majority of survey respondents rated health care services provided by ADES' Comprehensive Medical and Dental Program (CMDP) to youth under the age of 18 while in foster care as effective.

Through AHCCCS (the state's Medicaid program), the Young Adult Transitional Insurance (YATI) provides youth turning 18 while in the Arizona's foster care system with health coverage until age 21. The passage of legislation by the Arizona State Legislature in 2013 extends this health care coverage for transitioning youth from age 21 to 26, beginning January 1, 2014, as mandated by the federal Affordable Care Act.

Jewish Family and Children's Services (JFCS) - Transition to Independence Program (TIP) was developed in partnership with ADES-DCYF Arizona Young Adult Program in Maricopa County to address the needs of older youth transitioning from foster care with emotional and behavioral health challenges. JFCS, a local provider of children's and adult behavioral health services, implemented a specialized program integrating staff and funding to serve transitioning youth age 16-21.

**Enhancement Opportunities:** There is a lack of clear understanding by youth and providers of the initial enrollment process (transfer from the ADES-DCYF CMDP program to AHCCCS YATI). Some youth are also not approved for AHCCCS YATI because they either were not asked about their history

in foster care or they failed to disclose the information to eligibility staff. There is also a general lack of awareness regarding YATI among attorneys, CASAs, foster parents, Foster Care Review Board members, and social service providers surveyed. Additionally among youth interviewed, it was not uncommon to hear they were denied AHCCCS coverage by an eligibility worker even though they were indeed eligible.

When youth reach age 18, they are transferred from a children's behavioral health network of services and providers to the adult behavioral health services and programs both administered by a Regional Behavioral Health Authority (RBHA). Policy and practice provide for transition assistance to insure continuity of services. In some areas the transition can be more complex if a change in agency is required or the youth does not receive transitional assistance from their current behavioral health provider when they turn 18. This can cause a disruption in services, including medication and counseling at a critical time in a young person's life. The majority of intensive resources for adults are prioritized for patients with a Seriously Mentally Ill (SMI) diagnosis. For young adults transitioning from foster care and in the children's behavioral health system who are not SMI, the available services and resources in the adult system are much more limited.

## ***7. Social Capital***

**Successes:** Several mentoring, peer support and training organizations exist for youth to network, build relationships and connect to resources. MY LIFE (Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment), PASSAGE Transition Coalition, and In My Shoes create a venue where youth who have experienced foster care can provide support for their peers; develop critical skills in leadership, mentor, attend skills trainings and workshops, build self-advocacy skills, as well as form healthy relationships with caring adult allies. Adult mentors often provide a bridge to community resources and opportunities youth might not otherwise have access too.

The CASA program also provides youth who have been in foster care with caring adults who can advocate and mentor them while in care.

**Enhancement Opportunities:** While relationships with CASA's and mentors were described as positive and long term, there are not enough screened, trained and caring volunteers to meet the demand of all the youth in care. Additionally, youth who experience several placement types or move frequently within a year can face challenges connecting with their mentors. Some group homes or congregate care placements have restrictions on visitors that can make meeting with mentors difficult.

## **Conclusion**

The wealth of information outlined in the full Environmental Scan provides a solid foundation to identify and prioritize action steps needed for the Arizona Youth Opportunity Initiative Implementation Plan. There is much that can be done in Arizona to engage and support youth transitioning from foster care and provide them more quality opportunities for success.