

EXTENDED FOSTER CARE FOR YOUTH

Beyond Age 18



FAAZ YOUNG ADULT LEADERSHIP BOARD

Turning 18 in foster care without a stable permanent home can be discouraging, as young people are suddenly faced with the responsibility of managing everything alone, including housing, finances, health, education, and relationships.

The Fostering Advocates Arizona (FAAZ) Young Adult Leadership Board represents a diverse network of foster care alumni and they have identified the need for stronger transitional support for young people aging out of foster care beyond age 18. This policy brief describes extended care and makes recommendations for improvements to anyone involved with a young adult who is living in foster care or who has left foster care including the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS), policy makers, foster parents, group home staff, kinship caregivers, judges, judicial officers, attorneys, guardians ad litem, Foster Care Review Board members, Court Appointed Special Advocates, and contract providers.

The FAAZ Board acknowledges and appreciates the current emphasis that the DCS has placed in their FY19 Strategic Deployment Plan to “Increase successful transition to adulthood of all children 14+ while in foster care.” Working toward this goal, DCS is currently engaged in efforts to improve staff training, practices and policies to be more supportive and engaging with youth. State legislation¹ is also moving forward to allow DCS to meet federal requirements for case management and oversight that will allow additional federal funds to support extended care programming. The FAAZ Board trusts that the identified strategies for improvement will help advance better outcomes for young people transitioning from foster care.

TOP 5 BENEFITS OF VOLUNTARY EXTENDED CARE

*According to FAAZ
Young Adult Leadership
Board Who Have
Experienced It*

1

SUPPORT

Identify goals

Explore interests
and passions

2

EDUCATION

Program information
Scholarship assistance
Application guidance

3

FINANCES

Help with living
expenses

Money management

4

EMPLOYMENT

Resume writing

Job application support

5

COMMUNITY

Connect with mentors

Network with alumni

Young Adults Who Leave Foster Care Face Large Challenges

Turning 18 in foster care is overwhelming. Young adults possess the natural inclination to be independent, away from state supervision. However, most are not equipped to manage life completely on their own. Research finds that young adults who transition from foster care at age 18 benefit from continued assistance, supportive relationships, and practice with decision-making.



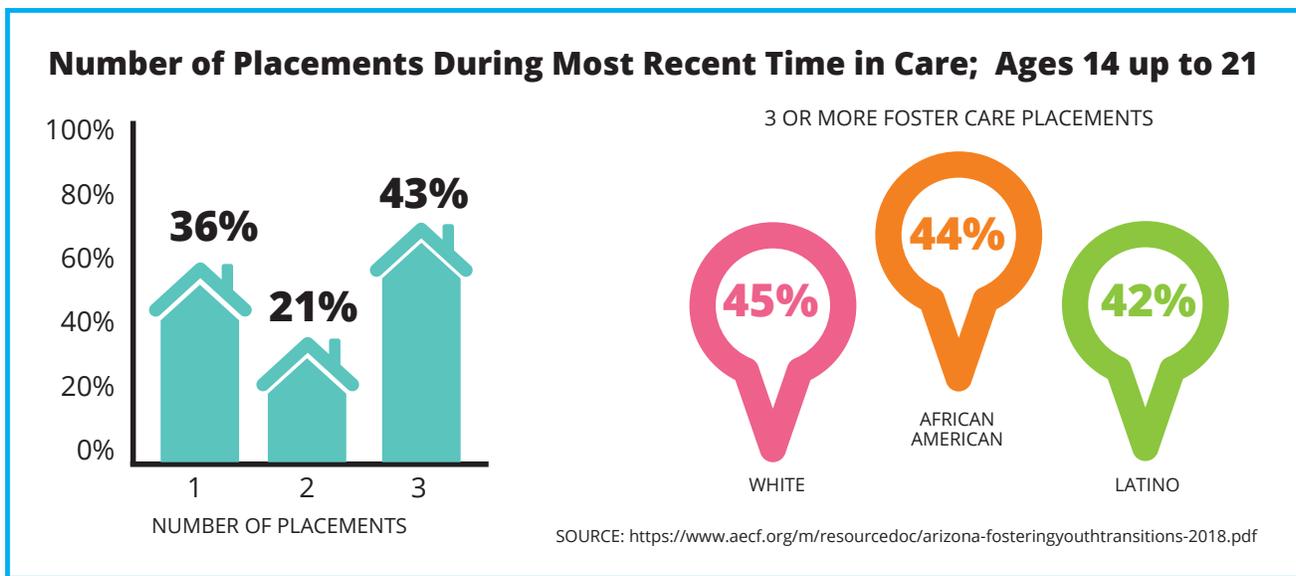
More than half (52%) of Arizona's young people turning 18 in foster care were living in a group home or institutional placement, which is the least optimal place for an emerging adultⁱⁱ. A group home is often abnormally restrictive and can interfere with a young person's development and ability to form healthy relationships and familial connections.ⁱⁱⁱ



Experiences while in foster care, including frequent moves can lead to worse outcomes for youth. 43% of youth ages 14+ in foster care experienced more than 3 placements during their most recent time in care.^{iv}



Despite the goal for all children in foster care to be reunified, placed with a relative, a guardian or adopted, every year more than 900 young adults "age out" of foster care in Arizona without legal permanency.



Voluntary Extended Care Can Help

For those young people who turn 18 while in foster care without a permanent home, DCS can provide voluntary extended care and services up to age 21. Voluntary extended care offers the support of a DCS Case Specialist and a variety of housing options. Participating young adults may continue to reside in the home of their foster parent or in a group home, or they may be offered an Independent Living Subsidy which provides a modest monthly stipend to support their transition from a structured living environment to an alternative living arrangement such as an apartment or college dormitory. In order for the young person to be eligible for extended care, they must actively be:^v

- ✓ completing a high school diploma or GED;
- ✓ enrolled in a postsecondary or vocational education institution;
- ✓ participating in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment;
- ✓ employed for at least 80 hours per month; or
- ✓ unable to be a full-time student or be employed because of a medical condition

Unfortunately for the majority of young people, their DCS Case Specialist determines they do not meet the eligibility guidelines or the young adult does not elect to stay in care. At age 18, many young adults report having "system fatigue" and want their foster care experience to end as soon as possible. Others have expressed confusion or a lack of understanding of how the services work, what the benefits are, and what is required of them.



“ For me I was afraid because I didn’t have the parental guidance that most kids had. But with extended care I knew that someone had my back, that I had something to lean on.”

– Jesus, Student at ASU

“ Before I turned 18, I had never worked before or lived on my own, so I think it would have been harder to do without support like the subsidy and having my case manager there.”

–Nikki, ASU Alumni & Licensed Benefits Advisor



The Number of Participants in Extended Care has Dropped

Nearly 2,670 youth exited care from FFY 2015 through 2017 on or after their 18th birthday. However, only 845 youth were in extended care through a Voluntary Extended Care Placement Agreement on September 30th, 2017.^{vi} Additionally, from 2016 to 2017, there was a 15% decrease in the number of young people receiving the Independent Living Subsidy (from 892 youth to 755 youth).^{vii}

DCS offers an avenue for young adults who decide to exit foster care at or after age 18 to “re-enter” into voluntary extended care at any point up to their 21st birthday. Yet, only 45 total young adults re-entered care in 2017 and 2018; 49% of those who requested re-entry.^{viii}

Young People do Better with Extended Care

While some young people are extraordinarily resilient and able to navigate through the trauma and challenges they faced while in foster care, national data tells us that foster care alumni experience poor long-term outcomes at a much higher rate than their peers in the general population when they are disconnected. A Chapin Hall study^x found that those youth who stayed in foster care after 18 were 2.5 times less likely to report homelessness than those who left and those who received extended care were also more likely to have a high school diploma, attend college and have access to food and emotional support.

Failure to engage young adults in extended care can be a great personal cost and consequence to the individual; the financial costs to public programs and society is substantial as well. A comprehensive analysis of national data explored the economic costs associated with the disparate outcomes for young people who age out of foster care in four areas: education, early parenthood, homelessness and incarceration. The study concluded that extended care and support in these domains would significantly improve outcomes and reduce costs to society by \$4.1 billion nationally.^x

OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE



Lower rates of high school graduation and reduced lifetime earnings



Higher rates of early parenthood, resulting in a loss of income, increased medical expenses and an increased likelihood their child will be in foster care



More likely to experience homelessness and need access to homeless shelters



Higher rates of juvenile and adult incarceration and recidivism



A Call to Action

Arizona should take decisive action to encourage young people to commit to extended care and to better assist them with the skills and supports they need to be successful adults. Specific recommendations from the voices of young adults that have experienced foster care in Arizona include:

Increase DCS Case Specialists Accessibility & Expertise:

A young adult's relationship with their DCS Case Specialist is a critical piece in their decision to participate in voluntary extended care. Better training is required to ensure DCS Case Specialists have the knowledge to clearly explain the benefits of voluntary extended care, assist young people in meeting their eligibility commitment and help them to cultivate a network of supportive relationships with mentors, coaches, employers and other caring adults.^{xi} DCS Case Specialists should have case loads of no more than 25 transition age youth to give them the accessibility and time for meaningful and regular contact in person, by phone and text.

Allow Young Adults to Evolve & Grow:

Brain development research affirms that the adolescent brain is not fully developed until around age 25; mistakes and risk-taking are a natural part of growing up. DCS should provide age-appropriate training, guidance and support while allowing young adults to make decisions and learn from their mistakes. Individual case planning must be responsive to their evolving plans for housing, education and employment; mistakes should be reasonably tolerated and not result in automatic expulsion from extended care programming.

Expand Available Affordable Housing Options:

To decrease the incidence of homelessness and enable their growing independence, young people in extended care or exiting care at age 18 need access to supportive and affordable housing options such as supervised independent living apartments, semi-supervised apartments, scattered site housing, host homes, college dorms, and specialized housing for pregnant and parenting young people. DCS should enhance efforts with public housing programs and community stakeholders to expand the number of safe, affordable housing units for young adults exiting foster care.

Raise the Independent Living Subsidy:

The Independent Living Subsidy does not reflect the cost of living and does not consider the young persons' individual financial need. In Arizona, the average monthly cost of living is estimated to be \$2,098^{xii}; the subsidy starts at \$715 and is reduced every 6 months by \$50 to \$315 at age 21. The Independent Living Subsidy needs to better reflect the young adults' life circumstances to help ensure stability.

Adjust Re-Entry Policies:

For young adults who have left care after turning 18, there is the ability to re-enter care, but there are too many hoops that a youth must jump through to get accepted back into care. DCS policy states that young adults who wish to re-enter care must demonstrate at least two consecutive months of active participation in a case plan including educational, vocational, employment or employment readiness activities. This may be more than a young adult is capable of when desperate for help due housing instability and/or mental or physical health challenges. DCS should expedite re-entry overall, however, immediate re-entry should be provided for young adults who are experiencing homelessness, domestic violence, sex trafficking or any other situation imposing a risk to safety.

SB 1539 – Extended Foster Care Program, as of February 21, 2019.

ⁱArizona Department of Child Safety, Semi Annual Child Welfare Report, September 2018

ⁱⁱ"The Road to Adulthood: Aligning Child Welfare Practices with Adolescent Brain Development"; 2017, Annie E. Casey Foundation

ⁱⁱⁱ<https://www.aecf.org/blog/first-of-its-kind-national-data-track-troubling-outcomes-of-youth-transitioning>

^{iv}Ariz. Admin. Code R21-5-205

^vArizona Department of Child Safety, Child Welfare Reporting Requirements, Semi-Annual Report April 1, 2017 to September 30, 2017.

^{vi}Arizona Department of Child Safety, Child and Family Services Annual Progress and Services Report for FFY 2019.

^{vii} Email from Arizona Children's Association to Children's Action, March 6, 2019

^{viii}Courtney, M.E., Okpych, N.J., Charles, P., Mikell, D., Stevenson, B., Park, K., Kindler B., Harty, J., & Feng, H. (2016). Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH0: Conditions of Youth at age 19. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

^{ix}Future Savings; The Economic Potential of Successful Transitions from Foster Care to Adulthood. Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2019.

^xFoster Care to 21: Doing it Right. Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2011.

^{xi}Economic Policy Institute, March 2018. Based on 2017 cost of living not including health care, child care costs and taxes. <https://www.epi.org/resources/budget/>