DESTINATION FUTURE

NATIONAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

Report

AUGUST 14–17, 2008
CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND

Our mission:
To enhance the quality of life of our nation's youth and their families by improving the effectiveness of human services.

Presented by:

The University of Oklahoma OUTREACH

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development

A service of DHHS Children's Bureau
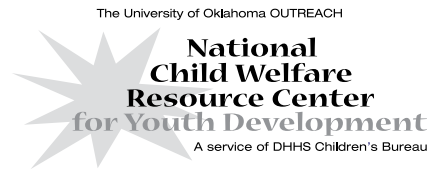
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Destination Future 2008

What Is Destination Future?

On any given day in the United States, there are approximately 100,000 young people in foster care age 16 and older. Some of these young people have been in foster care for many years; others have only recently entered foster care. Some of these young people will be discharged from foster care to the care of biological parents, adoptive parents, or relatives before they reach the age of majority; others will age out of foster care having reached an age where the state will no longer support them financially.

Regardless of where they go when they leave foster care, what these young people have in common is that they will have spent a large portion of their adolescent years in a system that does not adequately prepare them for making the transition from adolescence to self-sufficient adulthood. This preparation is a complex process even for young people who have the support of a loving family. For youth in the foster care system, accomplishing even the most basic steps toward self-sufficiency can be an uphill struggle. These youth often do not have the necessary support from caring adults to help them navigate the path to self-sufficiency. In addition, their concerns and ideas about how the system can better help them achieve this goal often go unheard or unheeded.

The fact that foster youth often lack the opportunity to have their voices heard has served as an impetus for conferences like Destination Future and the Youth Adult Partnership Academy.[1] Over the years, information from youth in foster care has guided the focus and issues considered during each conference. In addition, the belief that foster youth should have a voice in what happens to them in their lives resulted in the Federal government requiring states to include foster youth in the Child and Family Services Reviews and to ensure that youth are available to speak with Federal reviewers about their experiences in foster care.[2]

Destination Future is a youth leadership conference hosted by The University of Oklahoma OUTREACH National Resource Center for Youth Services, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development.[3] The conference provides young people who are in foster care or have recently left foster care with the opportunity to come together, share their concerns and ideas, and recommend improvements to the system. While the youth are doing this important work, they are surrounded by caring adults who are there to support them. The voices heard at Destination Future are the voices of the youth.

Destination Future gives youth the opportunity to band together and to voice their experiences and opinions.

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[1] Information on the Youth Adult Partnership Academy is provided in Appendix A.

[2] The CFSR Report on information obtained from the youth interviews is included as Appendix B.

[3] The Destination Future conference is funded through a cooperative agreement with the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

Who Came To Destination Future 2008?

The 2008 conference was held from August 14-17 at the National 4-H Conference Center in Chevy Chase, Maryland, just outside of Washington, DC. A unique feature of the 2008 conference was that all conference activities were facilitated by youth. Two interns with the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Youth Development, four FosterClub Allstars, and three Colorado youth leaders partnered with adult leaders as small group facilitators and as the master and mistress of ceremonies. The small group facilitation was lead through a youth/adult partnership in which the youth was to take the lead role in facilitation and the adult role was to support the process. Together as a team, the young adult and the supportive adult would empower the participants to identify barriers within the child welfare system and brainstorm creative strategies to overcome these challenges.

Destination Future 2008 was attended by 94 youth and their 78 adult sponsors. They came from 18 states and the District of Columbia. The states included Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Illiniois, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, Nevada, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin, and West Virginia.

Youth Participants

Eighty-eight of the youth completed information questionnaires designed to find out more about their experiences and their hopes for the future.[4] The youth completing questionnaires ranged in age from 15 to 23. The majority were age 17 and 18 (65 percent); only 4 (5 percent) were younger than age 17, while 27 (31 percent) were age 19 to 23. The youth attending the 2008 conference tended to be somewhat older than those attending Destination Future 2006. At that conference, 19 percent of the youth were age 16 and younger and 22 percent were age 19 and older.

The responses to the questionnaire indicate that the vast majority of youth attending Destination Future 2008 are focused on their futures, have taken on leadership roles in their communities, and have already taken considerable steps toward making a successful transition from

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[4] The questionnaire is provided in Appendix C.

adolescence to young adulthood. These youth are exceptional not only compared to other youth in foster care, but also to the general youth population.

Table 1 provides the questionnaire information with regard to education. As shown in the table, 57 percent of the youth were attending high school and 97 percent of the youth not attending high school had either graduated or received a GED. Particularly noteworthy is the finding that 97 percent of the youth completing the questionnaire indicated that they plan to attend or are attending college, a vocational-technical school, or some other institution of higher education. This level of educational attainment and aspiration is not typical for youth in foster care or even for youth in the general population.

Table 1: Educational Experiences

Questionnaire items	Yes	No	No. Responding
I am attending high school.	57%	43%	88
I have graduated high school or received a GED (of the 38 who were not attending high school).	97%	3%	38
I am planning on attending or I attend college, vocational-technical school, or another educational institution.	97%	3%	88
I have received information on scholarships or other financial aid from my caseworkers.	74%	26%	88

Despite their high educational goals, one-fourth of the youth indicated that they had not received information from their caseworkers about the scholarships and financial aid that may be available to them. Such information is critical to ensure that youth can attain their educational goals.

The data in table 2 indicate that most youth are members of a leadership group or advisory board (78 percent) and actively participate in their case planning (89 percent). However, the data also indicate that only slightly more than one-half of the participants had heard of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). The CFSR is the federal government's monitoring review of state child welfare systems. The federal government requires states to include youth in foster care as partners in key components of the CFSR, such as developing the Statewide Assessment, participating in interviews during the onsite review, and preparing the program improvement plan. Because the youth attending Destination Future 2008 are those who are active in leadership groups and advisory boards in their communities, they should be included in the CFSR process or at least made aware of the process.

Table 2: *Youth Involvement*

Questionnaire items	Yes	No	No. Responding
I am familiar with the Child and Family Services Reviews.	52%	48%	88
I am currently a member of a leadership group or other youth advisory board in my state or county.	78%	22%	88
I actively participate in my case planning.	89%	11%	88
I have conducted training in my state for foster parents, adoptive parents, or social workers.	42%	58%	88

Also shown in table 2, only 42 percent of the youth reported that they participated in training programs for foster parents, adoptive parents, and social workers. Again, because these youth have assumed leadership roles in advocating for themselves and other youth in foster care, they are likely to be effective teachers to help prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and social workers understand the problems and concerns of youth and their perspectives on life in foster care.

According to the data in table 3, for the most part, the youth attending Destination Future 2008 believe that they have the supports in place that they need to be successful (85 percent), and that they have, or could have (if they wished), regular contact with their siblings (84 percent) and biological parents (87 percent). These percentages are somewhat higher than those found for the youth attending Destination Future 2006. In the 2006 conference, only 77 percent of youth reported regular contact with parents, while 79 percent reported regular contact with siblings. This may be due to the higher percentage of youth age 19 and older attending the 2008 conference (31 percent) compared to the 2006 conference (22 percent).

Table 3: *Support Systems*

Questionnaire items	Yes	No	No. Responding
I have regular contact with my brothers and sisters.	84%	16%	81
If I wish, I am able to have regular contact with my biological parents.	87%	13%	77
I feel I have the supports in place to be successful.	85%	15%	77

For the 2008 conference, lack of regular contact with biological parents appears to be related in part to the age of the youth. Seven of the 10 youth who answered "No" to the question regarding contact with biological parents, were age 17 or younger while 3 were age 18 and older. However, lack of regular contact with siblings does not seem to be age related. Seven of the youth answering "No" to the question about contact with siblings were 18 and older, and 6 were 17 or younger.

The youth also responded to questions about adoption and other permanency options. As shown in table 4, most of the youth did not wish to

be adopted at the time they entered foster care (84 percent), and even more did not want to be adopted at the time of the 2008 conference (94 percent). Of the 11 youth who said they wanted to be adopted when they entered foster care, 7 were age 12 or younger when they entered foster care, but 3 were age 15 and 16 at the time of entry (one youth did not report age at entry). Two of the five youth who reported that they still wanted to be adopted were age 18. These data suggest that it is important to discuss the possibility of adoption with youth regardless of how old they are.

Table 4: *Permanency Options*

Questionnaire items	Yes	No	No. Responding
I wanted to be adopted when I came into care.	16%	84%	84
I still want to be adopted.	6%	94%	83
I have been informed about other permanency options that exist.	71%	29%	85

Table 4 also shows that only about 71 percent of the youth reported that they had been informed about other permanency options that exist for them. It is important that youth be aware that even if they do not want to be adopted, there are options such as guardianship or legal custody that may be available to them and that will provide them with a permanent home and family.

The questionnaire also asked youth to identify who they rely on for support. For the most part, as shown in table 5, the youth indicated that they rely on their immediate family (parents and siblings), their foster families or house parents, or themselves. It is interesting to note that only 3 of the 23 youth who said they relied on foster parents or house parents for support were young men. The young women attending the conference appear to be more likely than the young men to have strong connections with their foster care placements.

Table 5: *Sources of Support*

Who do you rely on for support?	Number (percent)
Immediate family (parents and siblings)	29 (35%)
Foster family or house parents	23 (28%)
Myself	20 (24%)
Social workers or CASA	14 (17%)
Friends	12 (15%)
Youth programs	7 (9%)
Mentors (teachers, coaches, etc.)	6 (7%)
Extended family (aunts or grandmothers)	5 (6%)
God/Spirituality	3 (4%)
Number of respondents with classifiable responses	82

Youth at the 2008 conference were more likely than youth at the 2006 conference to report that they rely on their own inner strengths and insights for support (24 percent compared to 12 percent). Again, this

may be due to the higher number of older youth attending the 2008 conference. Youth attending the 2008 conference also were more likely than youth at the 2006 conference to report reliance on foster families or house parents (28 percent in 2008 compared to 19 percent in 2006).

Although most youth attending Destination Future 2008 have made progress in transitioning from adolescence to self-sufficient adulthood, they still have concerns about their future. As shown in table 6, the most frequently cited concerns pertain to their ability to achieve their educational goals and support themselves when they are on their own. For many youth, these two concerns were linked—that is, youth saw achieving their educational goals as a means to ensure that they would be able to support themselves financially.

Table 6: *Biggest Concerns*

What are your two biggest concerns right now?	Number (percent)
Achieving my educational goals	33 (46%)
Having enough money – Being able to live on my own, pay rent and other bills	24 (34%)
What their future will be like – family, children, career, failure or success	16 (23%)
No concerns	10 (14%)
The well-being of family members – particularly siblings	6 (8%)
Health insurance when I age out of foster care	3 (4%)
Number of youth responding	71

The findings with regard to concerns are consistent with what the youth reported when asked how they would know that they had successfully transitioned to adulthood. The responses to this question, as shown in table 7, again indicate that for these youth, as for most youth, achieving educational goals and financial independence are seen as the keys to successful adulthood.

Table 7: *Signs of Successful Adulthood*

I will know that I have successfully transitioned to adulthood when . . .	Number (percent)
I have achieved, or am in the process of achieving, my educational goals.	27 (35%)
I can support myself financially and my life is stable.	37 (48%)
Other (e.g., I get married, can take care of family, age out of the system, make a lot of money, have a career, etc.).	13 (17%)
Number of youth responding	77

Adult participants

The youth participating in the conference were supported by 78 adult sponsors, 46 of whom completed adult questionnaires.[5] According to the questionnaires, most of the adult sponsors were social workers providing direct services to children and youth, with 11 of them specializing in youth

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[5] The questionnaire is provided in Appendix C.

services as independent living coordinators, youth support workers, Chafee community support services workers, and youth services consultants. The adult sponsors also included a program manager, a project coordinator, two advisors to a youth advisory board, a volunteer, and a therapist.

The vast majority of adults in attendance reported that most of the youth with whom they work will graduate from high school or get their equivalency degree (89 percent) and most will further their education after high school (84 percent). All adults (100 percent) indicated that they have made information on scholarships or other financial aid available to youth. However, because only 74 percent of the youth said that they received this information from their caseworkers, the group of adults attending the Destination Future 2008 conference may not be representative of many caseworkers in the child welfare system with regard to transmitting this critical information to young people in foster care.

Almost all adult sponsors said that the youth with whom they work participate in case planning (93 percent) and are able to have regular contact with their biological parents (98 percent). They also reported that the agency makes an effort to connect youth with their siblings (98 percent), and that the state provides youth in foster care with the opportunity to draft and implement policy affecting foster youth (89 percent). However, only 69 percent of adult sponsors said that their agencies use young people in foster care to help train social workers and foster parents. Although, only slightly more than one-half of the adult sponsors indicated that they frequently ask youth if they are interested in adoption (56 percent), the majority said that they have discussed all of the different permanency options with the youth (98 percent).

The adult sponsors attending Destination Future 2008 had concerns about the future for the youth with whom they work. Their concerns mirror those expressed by the youth. The four most frequently mentioned concerns (with 44 adults responding) were the following.

- Concerns about youth completing their education—36 percent.
- Concerns about the youth's general prospects for self sufficiency (e.g., their independent living skills, job readiness, employment opportunities, sufficient financial resources, etc.)—32 percent.
- Concerns about homelessness and about the lack of affordable housing—25 percent.
- Concerns about the social services resources that will be available to the youth when they age out of the system—18 percent.
- The signs of successful transition to adulthood reported by the adult sponsors also mirror those reported by the youth. The following are the four "signs" that were most frequently mentioned by the 38 adults completing this item:

The youth has an informal support system in place with friends and adults who can serve as role models—34 percent.

- The youth has completed high school or an institution of higher education—32 percent.
- The youth has a safe and stable living environment—26 percent.
- The youth has steady employment—26 percent.

What Did Destination Future 2008 Participants Do?

They Worked Hard!

The central focus of the Destination Future 2008 conference was the work done by the youth in small group discussion sessions. All youth attending the conference and their adult sponsors were divided into eight small groups. Each group had a particular issue to discuss and each group was charged with the task of identifying three key challenges to addressing the issue and the strategies needed to overcome those challenges. The primary facilitator for each group was a current or former foster care youth. Each youth had the support of an adult partner as a co-facilitator.

The groups met in four sessions and discussed the following issues:

- Group 1: Engaging youth in the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) implementation.[6]

- Group 2: Extending the Federal foster care program payments to age 21.[7]

- Group 3: Ensuring youth's success in their academic endeavors.

- Group 4: Meeting youth's cultural needs while in foster care.

- Group 5: Involving youth in the court case review process.

- Group 6: Developing and maintaining youth's connections to family members.

- Group 7: Ensuring that youth who do not go to college can still find a good-paying job.

- Group 8: Ensuring that youth's mental health services needs are met.

- The selection of these issues as a focus for Destination Future 2008 was based on information provided by youth about the kinds of things that are important to them and what they need to make a successful transition to adulthood. This information came from the CFSR interviews and focus groups and from interactions with youth in prior Destination Future and Youth Adult Partnership Academies. In addition, the issue concerning extending the Federal foster care program payments to age 21 was selected because legislation regarding this issue was under consideration by Congress and it was deemed important to obtain the youth's perspective on this issue.

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[6] Participants in this group were given a document entitled NYTD 101. This is included as Appendix D

[7] In October 2008, the U.S. Congress passed the Fostering Connections Act which gives states the option to extend foster care to age 21.

They Listened to Inspiring People!

In addition to their work in the small groups, the youth and adult sponsors attending Destination Future 2008 had an opportunity to hear the inspirational words, music, and humor of the following three keynote speakers.

Rashida Jolley

Rashida Jolley, Miss District of Columbia 2000, has a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from Nyack College. She is a national motivational speaker, harpist, vocalist, songwriter, composer, arranger, and recording artist who has appeared on television programs ranging from MTV to BET to TBN, FOX, C-Span and E! Cable Show. Rashida is a recipient of the 2001 Outstanding Youth Volunteer Award for Generations United as well as the 2004 Tomorrow's Leader Award from the Black America's Political Action Committee. At the Destination Future 2008 conference, Rashida delivered messages about the importance of perseverance and of believing in oneself no matter what others may tell you. She used her incredible musical talents and humor to get her message across and successfully engaged the youth in singing and cheering for themselves and one another.

Eddie Slowikowski

Eddie Slowikowski has inspired thousands with his message of conceiving, believing, and achieving one's dream in life. Eddie's unique presentation style is a multimedia experience. Each power-packed presentation is infused with music, pop culture, audience interaction, and fun—a combination of entertainment and a meaningful message. "The secret of life—enjoy the journey!" Eddie's sense of caring and passion for life are conveyed in his quest to infuse self-esteem and hope for the future to all who hear his message. It was clear that the youth attending the Destination Future 2008 conference received this message loud and clear while at the same time "rolling in the aisles" at Eddie's incredible antics.

Dr. Michael "Mykee" Fowlin

Mykee has been an actor since the age of 11. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri, where he also spent much of his time in the Speech and Drama department. In the spring of 2001, he received his doctoral degree in clinical psychology from Rutgers. He has combined both his interests into a profession that is geared toward the adolescent population. He has worked extensively with teenagers across the United States conducting peer mediations, diversity workshops, and violence prevention and gender sensitivity training. His presentation had an extremely powerful impact on the youth attending Destination Future 2008.

They Had Fun!

The youth had many opportunities to have fun and put their creative energy and imagination to use. Each small group created its own name and made a colorful and artistic banner to represent the group, which was displayed in the large conference hall.

Also, members of each of the small groups were given the opportunity to create a logo for the NYTD database and these also were displayed in the conference hall. All of these logos are shown on the website of the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Youth Development and are available for anyone to download and use. The Resource Center plans to use all logos on NYTD-related materials that they develop and/or distribute.
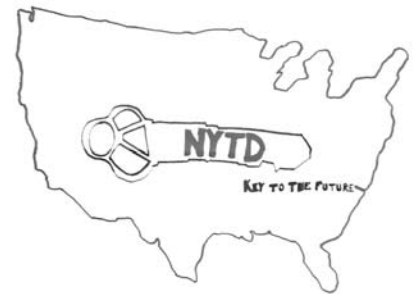
On one of the conference evenings, the youth dug deep into their personal creative resources and put on a fashion show for everyone using only newspaper (and tape, of course). The "fashions" included a wedding dress, a super hero that looked a lot like Batman, a tuxedo and cane, and a Carmen Miranda dress-alike.

The youth also had an opportunity to sightsee in Washington, DC and to view a multimedia presentation of the conference, prepared by Resource Center staff.

What Did The Youth
Have To Say?

Each group was responsible for identifying three key challenges relevant to the issue under discussion and then generating strategies that could be implemented to address these challenges. The results of this effort are presented below.

Group 1: Eclectic Minds: Nothing About Us Without Us

Discussion Question:

What are some challenges to engaging youth in NYTD implementation?

NYTD was developed by the Federal government to track services and outcomes for adolescents in foster care and for young people aging out of the foster care system. It is a mandatory data collection and reporting system that includes information on specific outcomes experienced by youth up to age 21. The Eclectic Minds identified the following challenges to engaging youth in the NYTD process and strategies for addressing these challenges.

Challenge 1: Inability to locate youth who have aged out of foster care.

This is a key challenge for NYTD because, for the database to accurately reflect the experiences of foster care youth, it must incorporate information about those youth who are no longer in the system. Because youth may not have a stable place to live after leaving the system, it will be difficult to find them to include their experiences in the database.

Strategies to address this challenge:

• Develop a national interactive website for foster care youth who have aged out of care. Youth can log onto the website to update their personal information (possibly setup profiles for themselves) and receive monetary rewards based on a point system. Points will be issued for active participation and activity on the site (determined by number of log-ins). The website also should provide information on NYTD to promote more awareness of programs' impact and purpose.

• Establish a 1-800 number that would serve as a helpline for youth who have aged out of foster care. Youth would be able to call this helpline to get information on a variety of concerns, such as health insurance, paying rent, etc. Youth would be asked to update their address and contact information when they use the hotline.

- Keep child welfare cases active for youth until the age of 21 and require monthly case meetings between the youth and their caseworkers. The caseworkers would then be able to have updated information on how the youth are doing.

- Provide different options for youth to give information relevant to NYTD, such as through e-mail, MySpace or other online options, or text messaging to a designated 800 number.

Challenge 2: Youth not being motivated to participate in NYTD – not having a reason to participate.

Youth who leave foster care often have not had very positive experiences while in foster care and do not view the child welfare system as particularly concerned about their best interest. For them to participate in NYTD, they will need to believe that their participation will benefit themselves and other foster youth and not just help the child welfare agency meet Federal requirements.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Offer incentives to youth if they participate. A rewards or point system could be established that would be connected to monetary compensation or gift cards. The youth could earn points or rewards for completing a survey or updating contact information.

- Educate youth about NYTD and the benefits of NYTD for those children and youth who are still in foster care. This also could be a focus for youth at the time they leave foster care.

- Use older youth to communicate with the younger ones about the importance of NYTD and why they should participate—a type of Big Brother or Big Sister communication.

Challenge 3: Youth not having good relationships with or trusting their caseworkers.

When youth do not or did not have a good relationship with their caseworkers, they are not likely to participate in the NYTD because they may be distrustful of the system and not want to share personal information. They may view NYTD as just "research" and as something that does not reflect a true interest in what is actually happening for them.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Caseworkers should have smaller caseloads so they can have more time with the youth and more one-on-one social outings to build a relationship.

- Caseworkers should learn to really listen to the children and young people so they can build communication and trust.

- Caseworkers should not be phony with the youth – should be real.

- Caseworkers should be knowledgeable about the benefits available to youth such as independent living stipends and ETV.

- There should always be a trusted back-up emergency contact person when the caseworker is not available and the youth needs to talk to someone.

Group 2: One Voice One Dream: Speak Out

Discussion Question:

What are the challenges of the Federal foster care program extending the age to 21?

As noted previously, this issue was selected as a focus question prior to passage of the Fostering Connections Act in October 2008. State child welfare agencies can use the information generated by this small group to help them make the decision to take the Federal option of extending the Federal foster care program to age 21, and to assist them in engaging in practices that will encourage youth to stay in foster care until age 21 so that they can receive the services and benefits they will need to support the transition to adulthood.

Challenge 1: There is a lack of quality placement options and dedicated/good social workers for older youth.

Many youth who could remain in the system and continue to receive services opt to leave the system when they are 18 because they are not comfortable with the placements they are in and they do not have positive relationships with their caseworkers. If the placements were of better quality and the youth had more positive relationships with caseworkers, then they would be more likely to stay in the system and, therefore, would receive additional assistance in transitioning to adulthood.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Improve the quality of foster homes for children and youth younger than 18 years of age so they will feel better about staying in the system when they turn 18.

- Improve training and preparation of foster parents and care providers by using young adults as trainers.

- Identify relatives for kinship placements early on when the child enters foster care so there is a family member to care for the youth when they reach the age of 18. There should be mandatory diligent searches for relatives for every youth.

- Educate foster parents on teaching independent living skills in accordance with the maturity level of the child.

- Offer ongoing life skills development classes throughout a youth's stay in foster care, not just after they have aged out or when they are transitioning out.

- Establish a policy where all youth who leave foster care can return to foster care if they want to, regardless of the type of placement they were in when they left foster care.

Challenge 2: There is a lack of information about how youth are doing after they leave foster care that would support the additional funding needed to keep youth in care until age 21.

There will be additional costs associated with extending the Federal foster care program to age 21. In order to justify the additional costs, it is important to find out how youth who left foster care before the age of 21 are doing and whether they would have done better if they had been in foster care until age 21. Some of the strategies to address this challenge overlap with those suggested by Group 1.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Use the outcome data from NYTD to support increasing the Federal foster care program age of eligibility from 18 to 21.

- Develop a tracking system for youth when they leave foster care by establishing mandatory exit interviews and asking youth at that time to list permanent numbers where they can be reached.

- Establish social networking sites (e.g., MySpace, facebook) for youth to log in and provide contact information.

- Provide TRAC phones ("pay as you go" cell phones).

- Provide monetary incentives for youth who stay connected.

Challenge 3: Regardless of whether they are or are not in foster care, young adults nationwide are not financially or emotionally independent at the age of 18.

The perception that an 18 year old can function successfully as an adult either emotionally or financially is not supported by what actually occurs in our society. Most 18 year olds are not expected to be fully self-sufficient at that age.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Implement efforts to change the stereotype that youth in foster care are expected to function as adults by the time they turn 18 and the stereotype of a "FOSTER KID."

- Improve youth's chances of being more successful in transitioning to adulthood by changing the legal age of adulthood (i.e., age of majority) to 21.

Group 3: T-MAC: Teens Making A Change

Challenge 1: Lack of finances for school-related needs.

Foster care youth need money to meet school-related needs such as books, supplies (i.e., notebooks, calculators, etc.) lab fees, clothes (uniforms), special events, school trips and other incidentals. Often, this money is not made available to them or it takes a long time to get the money after a request has been made. Also, sometimes foster parents expect the youth to pay for these supplies and activities themselves, even if the foster parents have received funds from the agency to pay for them. Youth are likely to be more successful in school if they have the money to pay for supplies and activities and do not have to worry about how they are going to get the money.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Inform youth about what financial resources are available to them and allow them to monitor their finances in conjunction with foster parents. This would also help youth develop budgeting and money management skills. Several youth shared that foster parents were giving them minimal amounts for clothing and school supplies when in fact they knew they had not spent their allotted amount.

- Include a financial plan in each case plan that foster youth and foster parents can review. This plan would clarify what financial resources have been allotted for the youth and how they are used to meet the needs of the youth.

- Establish a petty cash system so that the "turnaround" time for accessing funds for school supplies or school-related needs is reduced and supplies/needs can be accessed within a week's time versus the youth having to wait many weeks.

- Create a website to inform youth about resources, finances, and events that affect youth with regard to school-related issues.

Challenge 2: Lack of encouragement and support from school personnel and from foster parents with regard to school performance.

Often, school personnel have a negative perception of foster youth with regard to their ability to perform successfully in school. This affects the youths' perceptions of their own abilities. In addition, foster parents often do not take an interest in the youth's school work, do not encourage the youth academically, and do not advocate for the youth with the school system.

Strategies to address this challenge:

• Provide more training to teachers and foster parents who are involved with foster youth in educational settings. Also, develop a method for evaluating the implementation of information learned to see if the training has transferred to both settings.

• Increase the resources available for tutoring and emphasize in training that foster parents should advocate with the school for tutors when foster youth are struggling academically.

• Work with foster parents to ensure that they are more encouraging about academics and care more about how the youth is doing in school instead of being negative and/or apathetic about the foster youth's academic performance.

• Require that group home staff support youth in their academic efforts and train them in this process.

Challenge 3: Switching Schools Too Often

Foster youth have many stories to tell about how changing schools has a negative impact on their ability to be successful in school. When they change schools, they lose credits, important connections with teachers and coaches, and friends. Several youth shared that they have repeated courses in school since records were lost or credits were not acknowledged. When they go to a new school, particularly in the middle of a school year, they are faced with different credit requirements and different ways of doing things in the classes and must struggle to catch up with the new system.

Strategies to address this challenge:

• Make sure to get the youth's opinion regarding the impact of switching schools and pay attention to that opinion.

• Establish a requirement that once a foster youth enters the ninth grade, he/she should not be forced to switch schools throughout the rest of high school because academic performance in the high school years affects entrance into college.

• Establish a requirement that youth be given copies of all school records to avoid loss of credits.

• When youth are moved, the new placement should be in the same school district or transportation should be provided so the youth can keep attending his/her current school.

Additional Challenges and Strategies:

- There needs to be more advocating on the part of foster parents and the system to ensure that youth have knowledge about financial aid, scholarships, and how to use ETV, Independent Living, and Chafee funds to support the educational needs of foster youth. Foster youth shared that many of their caseworkers were unaware of these options and could not answer questions that the youth asked.

- There needs to be more assistance with transition into new cultural environments for foster youth and making foster parents accountable to integrate the cultural history of youth.

- For youth who go to college, there needs to be a place for them to go during vacations and summer breaks.

Group 4: Culture Shock: Origin Unknown

Discussion Question:

What are the challenges to meeting the cultural needs of youth in foster care?

Challenge 1: Dealing with youth culture – creating a youth-friendly environment and being able to engage youth.

Young people have a culture just as people of difference races, religions, or ethnic backgrounds have a culture. Often, many of the problems that foster parents or others experience with youth is due to a lack of understanding of the youth culture or an unwillingness to consider the youth culture as important when dealing with the youth.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Involve youth in training social workers and foster parents on what is important to youth and how to better understand youth. Youth could tell foster parents what they do in their everyday life and foster parents could tell youth about their daily lives.

- Create youth-friendly visitation rooms.

- Train foster parents in youth development so they have realistic expectations.

Challenge 2: Lack of funds for cultural activities.

Many youth in foster care are not placed with foster families that share their religion, ethnic background, race, or perspectives regarding other culturally-related concerns, such as gay and lesbian youth and transgender youth. Youth in group homes also do not experience a connection with their cultural backgrounds. Youth would benefit from

participating in community activities that support their cultural backgrounds. However, usually, there is a lack of funds to support these activities or for the foster youth to attend the activities that are already in the community.

Strategies to address this challenge:

• Encourage youth to develop and participate in volunteer projects involving culturally-relevant events for youth.

• Encourage youth to get involved in fundraising for cultural exchange programs.

• Help youth work with the community to get support and sponsors to support culturally-related events such as culture camps.

• Develop a cultural resources guide that has contact information for various centers of different cultures, so that youth can make their own connections.

Challenge 3: Lack of willingness of social workers and foster parents to adapt to foster youth's cultural preferences.

When youth in a foster home or group home do not have the opportunity to experience their culture, it often is because caseworkers and foster parents are not willing to make the extra effort to ensure that they have these experiences.

Strategies to address this challenge:

• Provide training to foster parents to ensure that their personal cultural beliefs and traditions, as well as religious beliefs, are not forced upon the foster youth.

• Make a greater effort to recruit culturally diverse foster homes so that youth can be placed in homes that reflect their own culture.

• Make a greater effort to provide services that support youth's identification with their culture.

• Develop cultural competency/diversity courses for youth and foster parents (or group home staff) to participate in together.

• Help foster parents access community resources to make it less of a "hassle" for them to get the foster youth involved in their own culture – such as finding someone to transport the youth to a synagogue or church that may not be close to the foster parent's home.

Group 5: The Voice

Challenge 1: Lack of awareness of the reviews (including the court proceedings and the dates and times of reviews).

Often, youth do not attend the court case reviews because they do not know when they are and they do not understand the legal jargon, the court proceedings, and how they can effectively participate in those proceedings.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Send a friendly letter to youth and families about two weeks prior to court review informing them of date, time, what to expect, what to wear, and other information that would make them feel more comfortable attending.

- Hold workshops for youth to increase their awareness of and self-advocacy in the court process.

- Develop a peer mentor/advocacy partner program for new foster youth that would allow older, more experienced youth to participate in proceedings for younger, newer youth who may not know the system or have the confidence to speak up. The peer mentors also could communicate with youth on court-related issues.

- Establish peer-led classes and trainings about the court review proceedings.

- Schedule court reviews months in advance and notify youth and families.

Challenge 2: Lack of transportation.

Youth often do not attend the court hearings because they have no transportation. Also, the court hearings usually are held during the school hours. Youth not only have to miss part of the school day, but also have to figure out the transportation from the school to the court.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Require caseworkers to arrange transportation for youth to attend court reviews.

- Decrease the distance between court reviews and youth's placement.

- Allow youth to be present by phone or letter.

- Schedule hearings in the evening or on weekends so that youth do not have to miss school or work.

Challenge 3: Poor relationships between the youth and their attorneys.

Youth often do not see their attorneys at all and do not have a personal relationship with them. This results in their being less motivated to participate in the hearing and less knowledgeable about what happens in the hearing.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Schedule meetings between attorney and youth prior to court date.

- Develop youth-led trainings for caseworkers and attorneys.

- Hold the system accountable for the number of attorney visits with the youth to ensure that there are frequent visits and that the youth can develop a relationship with the person who is representing them in court.

Group 6: Truth 2 Power

Discussion Question:

What are the challenges of developing permanent connections and staying connected with family members?

Challenge 1. Multiple placements and multiple changes in caseworkers result in the youth losing connections that they have established while in foster care.

Youth in foster care can have important relationships with foster families and caseworkers that help them when they are separated from their biological families. However, when caseworkers are constantly being replaced, and the youth is frequently moved from one placement to another, these connections are lost.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Youth need to have more information and earlier notification when there is going to be a placement change.

- Youth and foster parents should complete a "Get to Know Me" sheet that they can share so they can learn about each other.

- Copies of essential information (e.g., school transcripts and document and court reports) should be given to responsible youth for their keeping.

- The telephone numbers of prior foster parents should be kept in the placement folders so that the youth can contact them if they want to.

Challenge 2: Youth are not involved in permanency planning.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Youth should be able to send a letter or otherwise communicate with the judge.

- Youth should be able to make decisions about their permanency.

- Youth should advocate for themselves with their attorney, CASA, caseworker, and Guardian Ad Litem.

- More emphasis should be given to ensure that all parties (caseworkers, attorneys, CASAs, etc.) are involved with the youth more frequently than just at a court hearing.

Challenge 3: Foster families read intake paperwork and make judgments about the youth without meeting youth.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Foster families should meet youth before they read any paperwork about the youth.

- Youth should participate in the intake in the foster home so that youth can defend themselves if the foster parent has a negative perception.

- Paperwork on the youth should be updated every 6 - 12 months (based on circumstances) and should include input from youth on past behaviors and present status.

Group 7: Pretty Important People

Discussion Question:

For high school/GED graduates, what are the challenges of getting a good paying job to lead into a career?

Challenge 1: Youth's lack of knowledge of job skills.

In order to get a good job with a high school diploma, youth need to have job skills and need to know how to apply for a job and what skills they must have to maintain a job.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Establish a requirement that all youth in foster care must attend job skill seminars by legal working age. For example, retreats can be held for youth to practice skills such as writing resumes, having mock interviews, wearing the proper attire, and filling out applications.

- Establish programs or workshops during job skill seminars so that former foster youth can teach current foster youth about the importance of job skills and about the skills that they will need to have to get and keep a job.

Challenge 2: Finding the databases that are available to help youth find jobs that can lead to careers.

There is a lot of information on the Internet about different types of jobs and how to find a job, but youth do not always know how to find them.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Make sure that youth are able to attend meetings and be exposed to information that will help them find useful databases. They can get this information at job fairs and from local television channels, local newspapers, and local businesses that have bulletin boards. The library also offers free Internet connections or libraries with local references.

- Ensure that independent living social workers, caseworkers, and school counselors are aware of the information regarding databases and how youth might access them.

Challenge 3: Youth not understanding what to look for when they are applying for a job (i.e., What is in it for us?).

Strategy to address this challenge

- Establish a system for informing youth about the benefits they will need to look for when they are applying for a job, such as health and dental insurance, retirement, salary, etc.

Group 8: Destination Transformation... First Flight

Discussion Question:

What are the challenges of getting mental health needs met?

Challenge 1: Lack of support.

Foster care youth lack support in getting their mental health needs met. The decision about mental health services often is made without them and they have no input into deciding on either the service provider or the type of service.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Allow the youth to participate in choosing the therapist by creating a matching system to ensure that the skills and characteristics of the therapist match the needs of the youth.

- Provide services that focus more on the youth's present day concerns rather than on the past, and decrease the emphasis of therapy on negative events.

- Establish a program that provides mental health mentors for youth who inform youth about any meetings concerning their mental health services and who can work with them and advocate for them when they have concerns about the services.

- Make sure that youth have adequate transportation to access mental health services. Ensure confidentiality of therapy sessions and, in particular, ensure that what the youth say in the therapy session does not get told to the foster parents.

Challenge 2: Lack of education and information about mental health services.

Many youth are poorly informed about mental health services. They have stereotypical perceptions of people who need mental health services, and, particularly, of people who are on medications for mental health-related concerns. When they have been diagnosed and put on medications, they do not understand either the diagnosis or the medication. This lack of education and information is a barrier to their participation in mental health services.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- Work with youth to help them understand the benefits of mental health services and that they cannot always control mental health issues on their own.

- Help youth address the stigma and stereotypes associated with receiving mental health services, particularly being on medications.

- Ensure that youth are informed about any diagnosis and about the side effects or possible reactions to any medications that they are given. Ensure that medications are monitored so that youth are not being over medicated or over "therapized."

- Create a booklet or one-pager providing information about mental health services.

Challenge 3: Lack of insurance.

Youth who leave foster care often are cut off from any mental health services that they were receiving while in foster care because they no longer have insurance. Also, if mental health concerns arise after leaving foster care, the youth have no access to services.

Strategies to address this challenge:

- States should share ideas about how they are addressing this challenge and should use one another as resources.

- Nationwide, there should be mandatory insurance for foster youth up to age 21 or, even better, age 25.

Additional Challenges and Strategies:

· Finding the right doctor/therapist.

· Building trust.

· Preventing dependability.

Who Listened To What
The Youth Had To Say?

The goal of each small group was to present the challenges and strategies that they felt were the most important to a listening panel. The members of the listening panel were:

Pamela Johnson, a Senior Child Welfare Program Specialist serving as the National Program Officer for Independent Living and other youth-related child welfare issues in the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Administration for Youth and Families (ACF).

· O. Jane Morgan, currently the Director of the Capacity Building Division of the Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS.

· Adrienne Fernandes, an analyst in social policy with the Congressional Research Service, which is the non-partisan research arm of Congress.

· Andrea Khoury, JD, the Assistant Director of Child Welfare for the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues.

· Julie Ohm Chang, a Senior Child Welfare Data Specialist for the National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology.

· Stephanie Schanck, the Assistant to the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) and currently serves as Coordinator for Youth Development Activities for CWLA.

· Tiffany Allen, an award-winning social worker who has direct experience working with children and youth and is a research analyst at Child Trends where she conducts research in the child welfare field.

· The listening panel was created so that influential child welfare professionals could hear from the youth themselves about the challenges that youth in foster care encounter and their ideas about how to address these challenges and bring about positive change in the system. The goal of the listening panel is to have these professionals share this information with others in their workplaces and develop policies and practice that are relevant to and informed by foster youth.

The youth attending Destination Future 2008 were very excited about the opportunity to present their concerns and ideas to the listening panel. Each group presented with dignity, sincerity, and honesty and their ideas and recommendations were well-received and appreciated by all members of the listening panel.

The Overarching Theme

An overarching theme that emerged from the small group work, the keynote speakers, and the general interactions among the youth and between the youth and adults could be characterized as the importance of foster youth being involved in the decisions and actions that affect their lives. The popular slogan "Nothing about us without us" underlies almost all of the strategies proposed to address key challenges as well as the keynote addresses. This theme reflects the desires of these young people to be responsible for their lives and their actions, and to maintain their aspirations and dreams, often in the face of a reality that does not support them. These desires also emerged as the key themes in the youth comments provided in the Child and Family Services Youth Report that is included with this conference report. The Destination Future conferences provide youth with the opportunity to come together and reinforce this theme with one another and then share it with the people who need to hear it.

Appendix A: Youth Adult Partnership

About the Youth/Adult Partnership Academy

The Youth/Adult Partnership Academy was sponsored by The University of Oklahoma OUTREACH National Resource Center for Youth Services and supported by The University of Oklahoma OUTREACH National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development a service of the USDHHS Children's Bureau. The first Youth/Adult Partnership Academy was held August 16-19, 2007, at the LifeWay Ridgecrest Conference Center, Ridgecrest, NC. The Youth/Adult Partnership Academy is held in alternating years of The Destination Future Youth Leadership Conference.

The Youth/Adult Partnership Academy is an intensive training opportunity which promotes youth/adult partnerships that enhance leadership programs for youth in out-of-home care. This event is geared toward helping young people and the adults they work with to improve programs, policy and practices for young people. Attending this academy allows participants to build skills and knowledge that help them support youth advisory groups and other activities that involve young people on a local, state and national level. Participants attend as a state team, each team consisting of one or two adult sponsors and up to six young adults. The young adults in attendance were between 16-22 years of age who were currently engaged or had applied to participate in activities in their agency or state. Young people who formerly participated in these activities are also eligible.

As a team, they participated in four different Academy tracks which included, Influencing Programs and Policy, Media, Outreach, Youth Advisory Groups, and Developing Training/Presentation Skills. Each Academy track addressed multiple topics in each area. In addition to attending tracks, each team had time to meet to discuss what was learned and to plan future steps needed to achieve their team goals upon their return home. At the conclusion of the Academy, each Academy participant received a certificate of completion from The University of Oklahoma OUTREACH National Resource Center for Youth Services.

Track 1: Influencing Programs and Policy

The goal of this track was to educate participants about how the policy world affects them and how they can influence the policy world. This track introduced the topic of developing policies based on youth perspective on what needs to be changed in the foster care system. Youth identified common issues that face foster youth nationwide and explored ways to define, deconstruct and expound on the chosen issues in order to develop recommendations. This allowed each team the opportunity to begin planning their advocacy strategy. Youth gained an understanding of what advocacy is and the types of advocacy a group may seek in order to have their voices heard.

Track 2: Media Outreach

In this track, the FosterClub All-Stars helped build the capacity of participants through skill-building activities outlined in activities and publications which give youth tools to help get involved and succeed. This track provided an overview of such FosterClub products and activities including: Media 101 Overview, Strategic Sharing, Op-Ed and Editorial Board Meeting Strategy, Bio Development, and Media Interviews. The goal of this track was to educate young people from foster care on how they can leverage their stories to engage media attention to issues surrounding foster care issues.

Track 3: Youth Advisory Groups

Staff and youth leaders from Maine's Youth Leadership Advisory Team presented what it takes for youth and adults to work successfully and effectively together to address important community and/or state issues. In this dynamic track, youth and adults learned about recruiting and engaging members, how to overcome obstacles, building successful advisory groups, and about the kinds of committee and board work that youth and adults can do together.

Track 4: *Developing Training/Presentation Skills*

Youth currently in foster care and foster care alumni are being asked more and more to come and share their story or to help others understand the importance of using their voice. Having the skills and knowing how to put together an amazing presentation is an important aspect of being successful as well as taken seriously rather than being considered 'just a youth.' This track allowed teams the opportunity to learn how to do this by learning what the various learning styles are, the anatomy of a presentation, identifying and knowing personal strengths, and learning where the line is for sharing too much. During this track each team developed a working presentation which allowed them to begin planning presentations which address issues of their choice.

Appendix B: Youth In Foster Care
What The Youth Say

The purpose of this report is to present the voices of the youth who were interviewed as part of the CFSR process. The current report includes information from youth interviewed during the second round of the CFSR, beginning in fiscal year 2007. The report includes comments from foster care youth and former foster care youth in 15 states that had a CFSR during FY 2007.

What The Youth Say *About Living In Foster Homes*

They don't like it…
• When foster parents are not well-trained or do not really care about them.

• When they don't feel safe in their foster home.

They like it…
• When the foster parents make them "feel like family."

• When foster parents make an effort to bond with them and listen to them.

• When they are able to participate in foster parent training to help foster parents better understand the needs of youth in foster care.

The system should…
• Give youth more say in where they live, and time to adapt and prepare for transitions to a new placement.

• Monitor foster homes more closely by visiting more often and asking foster youth questions about the safety of the home.

• Give youth opportunities to participate in foster parent training.

What The Youth Say *About Living In Group Care*

They don't like it…
• When the many rules in group homes interfere with their ability to have jobs and to enjoy leisure time.

• When there is a lot of tension in the group home caused by other residents who are angry because of their life circumstances or because of their dissatisfaction with the group home rules.

• When their complaints about the group home are not taken seriously by group home staff or by their caseworkers.

They like it…
• When they feel safe from harm living in the group home setting.

• When they receive good services while living in group care, such as counseling and independent living skills training.

The system should…
- Provide trial visits or orientation visits for youth who are transitioning into group care.
- Provide more training to group home staff about how to work with foster care youth.

What The Youth Say About *Moving Around*

They don't like it…
- When they are moving around too much and the multiple moves make it difficult to bond with anyone because they don't feel trusting that they will not be moved again.
- When they are moved to new placements without being told why. (The youth often used terms such as "kicked out" or "thrown out" of a foster home or group home in describing their moves. Some of the youth "took the blame" for the moves, saying it was their fault because of their behaviors.)
- When they are not allowed to take all of their things when they move or they lose some of their belongings in the process of the move.
- When they are moved to new placements without adequate notification, sometimes given only a day or two notice before being moved.
- When they are moved to inappropriate placements, such as detention centers, shelters, and residential treatment facilities, because there are no available beds in other places.
- When they have to stay in placements that they think are not safe or are not good for them. Many youth said that they runaway or "act out" just to get the agency to pay attention to the fact that their placement is not good for them and to move them. As one youth said "you take matters into your own hands, and then you get a change."
- When they have to change schools all the time and leave their communities when they are moved.

They like it…
- When they are in the same foster home for a long time so that they can develop a bond with the family and build trust and have some stability.
- When foster parents make extra efforts to ensure that they can attend their former schools after a move, particularly if they are in high school.

The system should…
- Make better matches between foster parents and youth, including assessing the youth before deciding on a placement.
- Let children and youth have trial visits in group homes and foster homes before they are placed there and then listen to the youth's opinions after the trial visits.
- Have more foster care placements that want to parent teenagers and specifically trained to do that.
- Train caseworkers to listen to the youth's concerns about placements and try to resolve issues. Some youth noted that sometimes youth don't always want what is good for them, but that caseworkers should listen anyway and then explain to them why they are not going to do what they want.
- Provide transition planning when they have to move to another placement.
- Train foster parents on how to treat foster children "like family."
- Make sure that foster parents and caseworkers understand the importance of extracurricular activities to youth in foster care, and that it is difficult to engage in these activities if they are constantly being moved.

What The Youth Say *About Their Caseworkers*

Although there were many youth who reported very positive experiences with caseworkers, the majority of youth indicated that they do not feel cared about or valued by their caseworkers and that their caseworkers do not meet their needs.

They don't like it...

- When caseworkers "do not listen to" and "ignore" foster children when the children express concerns about their placements. Many youth said that they ran away so that someone would listen to them.

- When caseworkers do not visit the children and do not return their calls.

- When caseworkers tend to "disappear" when the child is in residential treatment or when there has been a termination of parental rights.

- When there are too many different caseworkers, and the change often occurs without notifying the child and preparing the child for the change.

- When caseworkers visit children for just a few minutes, and do not see them separately from foster parents.

- When caseworkers are "too busy" so important case matters do not get done, such as finalizing paperwork for an adoption, making a referral for the Independent Living Program or other programs, or requesting permission for a child to attend a special event, such as a national meeting or a funeral.

- When caseworkers either are not well-informed about the services available for youth or are not interested in helping the youth access these services.

- When caseworkers make decisions about the youth's case plans without discussing it with them.

They like it...

- When caseworkers ask them if they feel safe, ask them how they are doing, spend time with them when they visit, and routinely check up on them to see how they are.

- When caseworkers make them feel cared about by helping them with special things, such as making sure they get to go to the prom or taking them shopping.

- When they have the same caseworker since they entered foster care.

- When caseworkers ask for input from the youth regarding their needs and goals and value their opinions.

- When caseworkers are well-informed about the services that are available for youth and discuss the various service options with the youth.

- When caseworkers are willing to talk to youth and explain why, even though they have heard what the youth say, they are not going to agree to the youth's request.

The system should...

- Train caseworkers to understand the signs of abuse because often young children don't feel safe saying that they have been abused by foster parents. (Side note: They should interview the children apart from the foster parents to find out what is really going on.)

- Train caseworkers to talk to youth about their various case plan goal options, including adoption and other planned permanent living arrangement.

- Give caseworkers smaller caseloads so that they are not constantly "jumping from fire to fire" and can focus on the children in their caseloads.

- Give youth the opportunity to request a change in caseworker if the caseworker and youth do not have a good relationship.

- Train caseworkers on how to talk to children about their families and other concerns and provide them with concrete help and answers when needed. (Side note: One youth noted that whenever she asked her caseworker about her mother, the caseworker would stop talking to her.)

- Make sure that caseworkers understand that it is important for teens to have a personal relationship with them so that they really know what is going on and can help.

- Make sure that caseworkers make unannounced visits to group homes and foster homes.

- Make sure that caseworkers understand that changing caseworkers is another "loss" for a child in foster care and that attention should be given to the transition. (Side note: They should prepare children for the loss in advance. When a case is transferred, the worker should meet with the child to say goodbye and to introduce the new worker.)

What The Youth Say *About Connections With Siblings*

In general, youth were passionate about their siblings and wanted to stay connected with them. They expressed that lack of connections with siblings was emotionally painful for them. Some of the youth indicated that they had not seen their siblings in years. Very few youth said that they did not want to see siblings. Most indicated that "the most important thing" was to be placed with their siblings or have frequent contact with them. The older youth expressed a lot of concern about their younger siblings who were separated from them.

They don't like it...
- When a youth is older and the agency stops arranging visitation with siblings and leaves it up to the youth to make the arrangements. This often means that the youth has to deal with foster parents who may not be supportive of visitation.

- When younger siblings are adopted and the adoptive families prevent them from having contact with their older siblings.

- When caseworkers don't help youth maintain contacts with their siblings.

- When siblings are placed together and then separated, and there is no explanation to the children as to why this is being done.

- When foster parents of younger siblings prevent older youth from visiting their younger siblings.

- When children are not allowed to see their siblings and no explanation is given for this.

- When the only contact they can have with siblings is during supervised visits.

They like it...
- When they are allowed to visit with older siblings who are not in foster care.

- When they are allowed to see siblings frequently and in unsupervised visits.

- When they can see siblings who are adopted.

The system should...
- Pass legislation regarding sibling visitation rights.

- Arrange for regular planned sibling visitation when siblings cannot be placed together.

What Youth Say About *Connections With Parents And Extended Family*

They don't like it...
- When they are placed far away from their parents and community.

- When parents are not provided with transportation assistance to visit them when they are placed far away.

- When visits with parents are used by foster parents or group home staff as a "reward" for good behavior or as a "punishment" for bad behavior.

- When they are not allowed to have visits with parents if parental rights are in the process of being terminated.

- When they are told that they cannot have contact with a parent, but no explanation is given.

- When visits with parents are supervised visits.
- When they are not given information about their families. Several youth were aware that in some situations, contact with family members was not a good idea, but they would have liked to know how they were.

They like it…
- When they are placed in close proximity to their parents.
- When they can see parents and relatives frequently.
- When they are protected from parents when that is necessary.
- When foster parents take extra measures to support parent-child contact. This included taking a child to visit a mother in jail, getting a mother's phone number so the child can call her, and even allowing visits with parents that the agency does not know about.
- When they are placed with a relative or with a close family friend.

The system should…
- Provide services such as counseling to build better parent-child relationships.
- Recognize that it is okay for teenagers to visit with their parents even if the parents are not adhering to case plan requirements, such as still using drugs. The older youth suggested that they can handle it and are aware of their parents' limitations. Youth noted that it is important to the youth to maintain the connection with parents even when they know that they cannot live with the parent.
- Be sure that children in foster care are informed about the "rules" that govern visitation.
- Explore relatives as placement options and explain to youth why a particular relative placement did not work out.

What Youth Say About *Other Connections*

They don't like it…
- When their placement is far from their neighborhoods, friends, and school.
- When they are not allowed to do things that other youth do or needed special permission (which often involved a lengthy process) to do things that most teenagers do. This included drive a car, go on dates, go outside without permission, make phone calls to family, go to the movies, spend the night at a friend's house, go to the prom, get school pictures taken, take food from the kitchen, get a cap and gown for graduation, and others.
- When they are placed in a home that does not support their culture.

They like it…
- When they can attend annual foster care youth conferences and local youth advisory meetings and workshops to connect with other youth in foster care.
- When they can stay connected to former foster parents.
- When they can stay in the same school and keep the same friends.

The system should…
- Develop a mentoring program or ensure that there is a committed adult for youth aging out of foster care because they need more support than they receive with regard to connections with other adults and family.

- Pay more attention to the child's connections and feelings about those connections when considering placements. As one youth said: "It's not just 'where are we going to put this kid,' it's about this kid who has feelings, wants to be comfortable, has connections."

- Provide specialized training to foster parents on how to support the culture of children who are not of their race or ethnicity.

What Youth Say About *The System*

They don't like it…
- When they don't know what their permanency goal is or what is in their case plan.

- When they know what the goal is, but are not given any information on how or when that goal will be achieved.

- When they are not adequately informed about how to get the services that they want.

- When the process for being able to do anything special is very lengthy.

- When there is no adequate transition plan for them at the time of aging out of foster care.

- When they don't know what the rules are regarding contacts with caseworkers, visits with parents and siblings, etc.

- When there is a change in caseworkers and their case plan changes, but there is no explanation for the change.

They like it…
- When caseworkers provide clear explanations of the youth's permanency goal and case plan.

- When they are very involved in the case planning process and are asked about needs and goals, and have input into what goes into the plan.

- When they get funding to support extracurricular activities such as the prom and sports.

- When there is a Youth Advisory Council that advocates for them with the system.

The system should…
- Have a pamphlet available for children and youth about the resources and services that are available to them.

- Create a youth advisory council, if one has not already been established.

- Hold meetings to discuss the youth's emancipation at least once a month to make sure that the youth is ready to age out of the system.

- Make sure that children receive counseling even if they don't want to go. As one youth said, "We don't always know what is good for us."

What Youth Say About *The Courts And Legal Representation*

Not all youth want to go to court. Some say that they are too busy, but others seem to be intimidated.

They don't like it…
- When they are not notified about court hearings.

- When they rarely see or talk to their GAL except just before a court hearing.

- When they are told by caseworkers that they shouldn't go to court.

- When they attend a court hearing, but then are not allowed inside the courtroom.

- When they attend a court hearing, but the judge does not ask them any questions and sometimes does not talk to them at all.

- When they are not given information about how to prepare for a court hearing, what they can say and what to do.

- When they can't find out what happened in court if they did not attend.

- When they feel powerless over what happens to them and feel that those decisions are made by people who don't know them at all, including the judge, caseworker, and GAL.

They like it…

- When they can write letters to the judge and feel like their views are heard by the judge.

- When they go to court and the judge asks them how they are, how things are going, what they need, and if there is anything they want to say.

- When they go to the FCRB or CRB reviews and have their opinions solicited and considered.

- When there is a GAL to represent them in court so that they don't have to go (but only when they feel comfortable with their GAL).

- When they have a supportive GAL who takes time to know them and tries to help them.

The system should…

- Require youth to go to a court hearing at least once so that they have that experience and they understand what goes on in the hearings.

- Allow youth to speak in court, but not in front of their parents or foster parents, unless they request it.

- Give youth the opportunity to speak directly and privately to the judge on a regular basis.

- Provide youth with orientation and preparation prior to going to a hearing.

- Assist youth in preparing a written statement when asked by the court to do so.

- Make sure that the attorneys who are supposed to represent them actually take the time to get to know them.

What The Youth Say About Independent Living And Transitioning To Adulthood

The majority of youth expressed gratitude for independent living services and life skills classes and found them to be both helpful and very worthwhile.

They don't like it…

- When no one tells them about the independent/transitional living services that are available.

- When they are not helped to access these services and have to fend for themselves.

- When there are delays in getting stipends or other resources that they have earned or been promised.

- When the independent living programs are too restrictive or do too much for youth, and don't give them enough opportunity to test out being on their own.

- When they can't get a job because they have no transportation and are not allowed to have a driver's license.

- When they don't feel prepared for independent living and worry about becoming homeless.

They like it…

- When they can get funds for college from the Educational Training Voucher program.

- When they have access to the flexible independent living funds that many states make available for extracurricular activities, high school functions, etc.

- When they get classes in money management and daily living skills.

- When they get assistance in managing money, banking, and in establishing independent development accounts (savings match accounts).

- When their ILP worker makes sure that they get the resources that they need.

- When their ILP worker maintains frequent contact with them and makes them feel cared about.

The system should…
- Provide youth with independent living services as soon as they are requested, instead of making youth wait for them because the services are full.

- Provide youth with independent living services as early as possible to ensure adequate preparation for independence and to prevent the youth from becoming homeless.

- Help youth get and maintain jobs by letting them get their driver's licenses.

What The Youth Say About *Their Experiences With School*

The majority of the youth we spoke with have experienced multiple placements, and they consistently reported that these moves have a negative impact on their schooling.

They don't like it …
- When they have to change schools because they are moved to a new foster home or other placement setting. Many youth who have had to change school systems have subsequently fallen behind in their studies and/or had to repeat grades, have had difficulty accumulating enough credits to graduate, and/or have had difficulty transferring credits from one school to another.

- When they have to go from small educational settings in group homes to larger classrooms in public school settings.

- When they are not informed about the Educational Training Vouchers (ETV) and other local programs that are available to assist them with attending college.

- When teachers have low expectations for them because they are in foster care.

They like it…
- When their caseworkers and other adults in their lives advocate with the school system on their behalf.

- When they can attend the same school while they are in foster care.

- When they get ILP funds to assist with high school graduation expenses.

- When ILP workers are knowledgeable and help them apply for college and financial aid.

- When they are able to get tutoring services.

The system should…
- Encourage youth to stay in school and stay focused on school.

- Make sure that youth can stay in the same school district whenever possible.

- Improve the system for enrolling in a new school, including timely transfer of records.

- When the child must change schools, provide support in transitioning to a new school.

What The Youth Say *About Other Issues*

About *Physical Health Care:*
- Youth indicated that their physical health needs are met in foster care, although a few concerns were expressed about dental care, particularly with regard to orthodontics.

About Adoption:

- Youth said that they would not consider adoption, but most said that this option had never been clearly explained to them.

- Some youth said that when they were first asked about adoption, they said no, but then they were never asked again.

About Mental Health Services:

Many youth reported that they attend counseling regularly and that counseling is a familiar requirement of their case plans.

- Youth expressed concern about having to take psychotropic medications, particularly multiple medications, that made them feel weird and that had uncomfortable side effects.

- Youth would like more information about their mental health treatment. They would like their caseworkers and providers to explain things to them about their diagnosis.

- They would like to have more of a say in discussing their medication management.

What Kids Want: Cross Cutting Themes

They want to feel that someone cares about them.

- They want the caseworkers and other adults in their lives to listen to them.

- They want a voice in what happens to them and to other children in foster care.

   They feel that advisory councils are empowering because youth have the opportunity to have a voice in changing the system for the better.

   They like being involved in decision-making about their lives, and they like when their opinions are sought.

- They want better communication with the agency about the rules and regulations of foster care and what is going on in their case.

- They want to do things like normal teenagers.

Appendix C: Youth and Adult Questionnaires

Adult Questionnaire

State: _____

Position Title:_____

Length of Time in Position: _____

1. Most of my youth will graduate from high school or get their equivalency.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

2. I expect most of my youth to further their education after high school.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

3. I have made information on scholarships or other financial aid available to my youth.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

4. I help my youth to plan for post-secondary education.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

5. My youth actively participate in their case planning.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

6. Youth are utilized in my agency to train workers and foster parents.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

7. Our state provides youth with the opportunity to work with state officials in drafting and implementing policy affecting foster youth.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

8. My agency/program makes an effort to connect youth with their brothers and/or sisters regularly.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

9. If my youth wish, they are able to have regular contact with their biological parents.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

10. I have discussed all the different permanency options with my youth.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

11. I frequently ask my youth if they are interested in adoption.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

12. My two biggest concerns right now for the youth in my care are:

    a. _____

    _____

    b. _____

    _____

13. I consider a successful transition to adulthood for the youth in my care to be: _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

Youth Questionnaire

State: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

1. I am attending high school.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

2. I have graduated high school or received a GED.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

3. I am planning on attending, or I attend, college, vo-tech or another educational institution.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

4. I have received information on scholarships or other financial aid from my caseworkers.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

5. I am familiar with the Child and Family Service Reviews (CRSR).   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

6. I am currently a member of a leadership group or other youth advisory board in my state or county.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

7. I actively participate in my case planning.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

8. I have conducted training in my state for foster parents, adoptive parents, or social workers.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

9. I have regular contact with my brothers and/or sisters.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ N/A

10. If I wish, I am able to have regular contact with my biological parents.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ N/A

11. I feel I have the supports in place I need to be successful.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Don't Know

12. Who do you rely on for support?_____

_____

13. I wanted to be adopted when I came into care at age _____.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

14. I still want to be adopted.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

15. I have been informed about the other permanency options that exist.   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

16. My two biggest concerns right now are:

     a. _____

     b. _____

17. I will know that I have successfully transitioned to adulthood when…

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix D: NYTD 101

What is NYTD?

In 1999, Congress established the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP). This program gives States flexible funding to assist youth in transitioning out of foster care. The law also requires the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to develop a data collection system to track the independent living services provided to youth and to develop outcomes that measure states' success in preparing youth for their transition from foster care to independent living. To meet this requirement, the National Youth in Transition Database, or NYTD, was created.

What data will be collected?

When NYTD is implemented, states will be asked to report the IL services provided to all youth in thirteen broad categories:

- independent living needs assessment
- academic support
- post-secondary educational support
- career preparation
- employment programs or vocational training
- housing education and home management training
- budget and financial management
- health education and risk prevention
- family support and healthy marriage education
- mentoring
- supervised independent living
- room and board financial assistance
- education financial assistance

States will also be expected to survey certain youth at ages 17, 19 and 21 about the following outcomes:

- financial self-sufficiency
- experience with homelessness
- educational attainment
- positive adult connections
- high-risk behavior
- access to health insurance

What is happening with NYTD now?

In February of 2008, states received a notice (called the Final Rule) about the data to collect and that collection would begin on October 1, 2010. The first data submission is due by May 15, 2011. States are now determining the best way to collect the data that is required by NYTD.

What happens if States don't collect the data?

States are required to get at least 80% of youth in foster care and at least 60 % of youth who have left care to participate in the youth outcomes survey. If states do not comply with (or meet) the data standards, they can be penalized between one and five percent of their annual Chafee Foster Care Independence Program allotment.

Why should you be involved?

This is your chance to make sure that IL services and outcomes for youth in your state are counted. Your involvement in NYTD will encourage your peers to participate, positively impact your own life, and, ultimately, improve services for younger youth in your state. We know that the outcomes of many youth who leave care are not always that positive. By participating and being active with NYTD, you can help change those outcomes. Get involved with NYTD!

What is your role?

Marketing NYTD – Get involved in spreading the word about NYTD. Talk about NYTD at teen conferences, youth advisory boards, trainings for child welfare professionals, and other places that involve the youth or caseworker.

The NYTD Process – Get involved with your state's NYTD team. Volunteer to complete a NYTD interview to understand the procedure better. Remember, data will be collected at ages 17, 19, and 21. You can be someone who helps to locate youth to interview. You can also interview current and former foster youth for the NYTD data collection as young people from care are more receptive to their peers in care rather than caseworkers.

Staff Training – Help train former foster youth and caseworkers on strategies for locating and engaging youth in the NYTD data collection process. Most caseworkers and other child welfare professionals may not have the technology savvy skills you may have when it comes to contacting and locating youth through popular social networks such as Facebook and MySpace.

Glossary of NYTD Terms

ACF – Administration for Children and Families

Baseline Population – For NYTD purposes, each youth who is in foster care as defined in 45 CFR 1355.20 and reaches his or her 17th birthday during FFY 2011, and such youth who reach their 17th birthday during every third year thereafter.

Final Rule – Established the National Youth in Transition Database in February 2008.

Follow-up Population – Each youth who reaches his or her 19th or 21st birthday in a FFY and participated in the state's outcomes data collection as part of the baseline population, as specified in 45 CFR 1356.82(a)(2). The follow-up population may be subject to sampling, as specified in 45 CFR 1356.84. A youth who participated in the data collection at age 17, but not 19 for a reason other than being deceased remains a part of the follow-up population at age 21. A youth is in the follow-up population as described regardless of the youth's foster care status at ages 19 or 21.

NYTD – Acronym for the National Youth in Transition Database.

Report Period(s) – NYTD requires semi-annual reporting. The six-month report periods are from October 1 to March 31, and April 1 to September 30. States must submit these files to ACF within 45 days of the end of the reporting period (i.e., by May 15 and November 14).

Reporting Population – The reporting population is comprised of youth in the served, baseline, and follow-up populations depending on the reporting period. These sub-populations are described elsewhere in this document.

Served Population – Each youth who receives an independent living service paid for or provided by the CFCIP agency during the reporting (six-month) period is part of the served population.
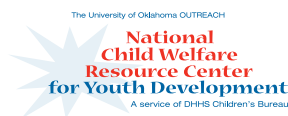
John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) – CFCIP provides states with greater funding and flexibility to carry out programs which assist youth in making the transition from foster care to self sufficiency. It was created with the enactment of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999.

Sources: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/nytd/about_nytd.htm

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NATIONAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

August 14-17, 2008
National 4-H Youth Conference Center
Chevy Chase, MD

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