



BARRIERS FACING FOSTER CARE YOUTH: National and Local Statistics about Emancipating Foster Youth

Foster Care / Length of stay:

- On any given day more than 500,000 youth are in some form of foster care cross the United States. Nearly 80,000 live in California.¹
- Nationally, each year an estimated 20,000 of these youth emancipate or “age out” of the foster care system, and are discharged from the system, whether or not they are prepared to transition to adulthood. About 25% of these youth live in California (In 2005, 4,249 youth emancipated from California’s foster care system).²
- More than 775 youth – or about 200 a year – will emancipate from the San Francisco Foster Care System from 2004-2008.
- Close to 50% of these youth are between the ages of 11-18 and due to their age, are likely to have a long or permanent placement in foster care.³

Housing Status:

- Within 18 months of emancipation 40-50% of foster youth become homeless.⁴
- Nationally, 27% of the homeless population spent time in foster care.⁵
- A history of foster care correlates with becoming homeless at an earlier age and remaining homeless for a longer period of time.⁶
- 65% of youth leaving foster care need immediate housing upon release.⁷

Education Status:

- 83% of foster children are held back by the third grade.⁸
- 75% of children and youth in foster care are behind grade level.⁹
- 46% of former foster youth complete high school (compared to 84% of the general population).¹⁰
- Based on high birth trauma and many life challenges, 50% of foster youth experience developmental delays, which is 4-5 times more than the rate found among children in the general population.¹¹
- 70% of teens who emancipate from foster care report that they want to attend college, but less than 50% complete their high school graduation and fewer than 10% of who graduate from high school enroll and college, and of those less than 1% graduate from college.¹²
- Nearly 75% of former foster youth applying for federally funded foster youth grants in California had an unmet financial aid need of more than \$45,000.¹³
- Less 25% of eligible former foster youth receive a Cal-Grant award.¹⁴



Employment:

- Emancipated foster youth earn significantly less than youth in the general population, additionally due to their specific circumstances current and former foster youth progress more slowly into the labor market.¹⁵
- In San Francisco, the median weekly salary of an employed former foster youth is \$205, compared to \$261 for the general population.¹⁶
- 50% of emancipated foster youth experience high rates of unemployment within 5 years of emancipation.
- 1/3 of former foster youth have incomes at, or below, \$6,000 per year, which is substantially below the federal poverty level of \$7,890 for a single individual.¹⁷ This is far below the estimated annual income of \$28,012 that a single adult would need to be self sufficient in San Francisco.¹⁸

Parenting Status:

- Forty-two percent (42%) of foster youth, including 60% of women, become parents within 2.5-4 years after exiting care.
- Parents with a history of foster care are almost twice as likely to see their own children placed in foster care or become homeless than parents without this history.¹⁹
- Females in foster care are six times more likely than the general population to give birth before age 21.

Health:

- Former foster youth are found to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at 2 times the level of U.S. war veterans.²⁰
- 33% of all foster care alumni have no form of health insurance.²¹
- Youth transitioning from foster care have disproportionately high rates of physical, developmental, and mental health problems.²²
- Children in foster care are more likely than other children on Medicaid to have a mental health or substance abuse condition.²³
- Nearly 50% of foster children suffer from chronic health conditions such as asthma, visual and auditory problems, dental decay and malnutrition.²⁴
- 50-60% of children in foster care have moderate to severe mental health problems.²⁵

Incarceration:

- There is a lot of crossover between youth in foster care and youth in juvenile dependency court in fact foster youth with multiple placements are 5-10 times more likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system than youth in the general population.²⁶
- 25% of former foster youth will be incarcerated within the first 2 years of emancipation.²⁷
- Youth in foster care are more likely to be detained than non-foster children, as judges perceive their lack of caregiver representation as an indication that the youth are less stable and less supervised than their non-foster peers.²⁸



¹ *Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data submitted for the FY 2005, 10/1/04 through 9/30/05*; Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Shaw, T., Dawson, W., Piccus, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Conley, A., Smith, J., Dunn, A., Frerer, K., & Putnam Hornstein, E., (2006). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved November 2006 from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/>

² Ibid.

³ *Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data submitted for the FY 2004, 10/1/03 through 9/30/04*.

⁴ League of Women Voters Life after Foster Care. League of Women Voters of California Education Fund, Juvenile Justice Study Committee, 2002. Available at <http://www.ca.lwv.org/jjds/chap6.html>.

⁵ *Report on the Survey of the Housing Needs of Emancipated Foster/Probation Youth. Independent Living Program Policy Unit, Child and Youth Permanency Branch: Author.* California Department of Social Services. 2002.

⁶ Nan P. Roman and Phyllis B. Wolfe. *Web of Failure: The Relationship Between Foster Care and Homelessness*, 1995. National Alliance to End Homelessness.

⁷ *Report on the Survey of the Needs of Emancipated Foster/Probation Youth*, June 2002.

⁸ Educational statistics cited from a fact sheet developed by the California Youth Connections, 2006.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Promoting the Emotional Well-Being of Children and Families Policy Paper No. 2 Improving the Odds for the Healthy Development of Young Children in Foster Care.* Sheryl Dicker, January 2002.

¹² *Assessing the effects of foster care: Early results from the Casey National Alumni study.* Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs, 2003. Available at www.casey.org.

¹³ Educational statistics cited from a fact sheet developed by the California Youth Connections, 2006.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *Employment Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care Final Report.* University of Chicago Chaplin Center for Children. Robert M. George et al., March 2002.

¹⁶ *Improving Independent Living Outcomes for Emancipated Foster Youth in San Francisco*, Mandy Folse, Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley. May 14, 2003.

¹⁷ *Improving the Family Foster care: findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni study.* Seattle, WA: Casey Family programs. Available at <http://www.casey.org>.

¹⁸ *The Self Sufficiency Standard of California 2003*, Diane Pierce with Jennifer Brooks, Californians for Economic Self Sufficiency, December 2003.

¹⁹ *Family Matters: A Guide to Developing Family Supportive Housing* Minnesota Statewide Survey of Persons without Permanent Shelter. Adults and Their Children, June 1998.

²⁰ *Improving Family Foster Care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study.* Casey Family Programs, 2005.

²¹ Ibid.

²² American Academy of Pediatrics. Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption and Dependent Care. November 2000. *Developmental issues for young children in foster care.* Pediatrics, 106 (5), 1145-1150; Rest, E.R., & Watson, K.W. (1984). *Growing up in foster care.* Child Welfare, 62, 291- 306. Both cited in *It's My Life*, Casey Family Programs.

²³ *Children in Foster Care: Challenges in Meeting Their Health Care Needs Through Medicaid.* Margo Rosenbach., Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Policy Brief. March 2001.

²⁴ *Health Services for Children in Foster Care.* Institute for Research on Woman and Families. December 1998 (2nd printing.)

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *Youth Involvement in the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems: A Case of Double Jeopardy?* Madelyn Freundlich and Leslee Morris, 2004.

²⁷ *Foster Youth Transitions to Adulthood: Outcomes 12 to 18 Months after Leaving Out-of-Home Care.* University of Wisconsin Courtney, Mark, Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, 2004.

²⁸ *Youth Involvement in the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems: A Case of Double Jeopardy?.* Madelyn Freundlich and Leslee Morris, 2004.