
Case managers should work with older youth as they identify their adulthood goals. Agency professionals can help identify the personal challenges a youth may face in working to achieve those goals and develop a strategy to address the challenges. The plan should include:

- Appropriate services during agency involvement.
- A plan to access needed resources once a youth ages out of the child welfare or juvenile justice system.

Agencies across child welfare and juvenile justice should adhere to the spirit of the Chafee mandate by encouraging youth to participate in service design and delivery in a more expansive way. Youth engagement, coupled with interagency collaboration, may enable agencies to deploy their resources more effectively by:

- Eliminating services and programs that youth identify as unhelpful or counterproductive.
- Expanding or creating services identified as effective by participating youth.
- Working across agencies to eliminate duplicative service provision, especially for crossover youth.

Effective youth engagement must be nurtured and must provide opportunities for experience. The direct involvement of youth in the advocacy for enhanced transitional supports is a powerful tool for building public will, but it requires deliberate efforts by agencies. Some jurisdictions work with foster care alumni organizations to train youth for participation in agency planning and professional presentations.

- Creating or supporting existing alumni organizations can provide much-needed feedback to agencies, as well as provide positive role models for youth currently struggling in their path to adulthood.

Recommendation 3: Ensure that the services available to youth are developmentally appropriate.

Assessment and case planning are essential to the provision of developmentally appropriate services for transitioning youth. The value of a careful assessment

cannot be overstated because it is the entry point for case planning in both juvenile justice and child welfare systems:

- *Craft initial assessments to gauge the youth's physical, emotional, educational, and vocational developmental status compared to other youths the same age.* Assessments should be structured to address these and other elements that predict adulthood success. All life domains should be addressed in the assessment and service plans.
- *Create assessment tools that measure the youth's development across factors that predict adulthood success.* All youth age 14 and older should be evaluated across these factors. By evaluating youth early, agencies can assign services that address any developmental deficits.
- *Target services to address developmental deficits.* When a youth age 14 or older is found to be developmentally deficient in one or more area(s), services should be targeted to accelerate development. Services should focus on those areas for which service acquisition is difficult after the youth reaches the age of majority.
- *Limit the use of criminal transfer for juvenile justice youth.* Transition-age youth demonstrate worse outcomes when they are processed by and detained in the adult criminal system, where they rarely receive developmentally appropriate services. To address these issues, juvenile justice professionals can:
 - Strengthen review mechanisms for transfer decisions. Judges, attorneys, and agency professionals should work together to ensure that transfer is used sparingly, if at all, and only in appropriate cases.
 - Increase coordination with adult correctional agencies. Juvenile justice professionals can collaborate with adult correctional agencies to ensure that transition-age youth and other young adults receive services that are developmentally appropriate.
- *Change legislative and regulatory mandates.* Youth-specific service provision can be effective even after a youth reaches the age of majority. If feasible, legislative

or regulatory changes in this area might prove useful. States may opt to:

- Extend foster care to age 21 with federal support, as provided by the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act.
- Extend Medicaid coverage for young adults through age 21.
- Create early asset building opportunities for older youth to build financial literacy.
- Raise the maximum age for which a youth may establish juvenile service eligibility. Some jurisdictions have already implemented extended jurisdiction. Although accountability and community safety are critical goals of the juvenile justice system, expanding the practice of extended jurisdiction to include developmentally appropriate service provision can help agencies achieve these goals by reducing the risk factors associated with future criminality and strengthening a youth's ability to navigate the adult world by addressing developmental deficits.

Recommendation 4: Use federal funding to create programs for older youth and track their outcomes.

Opportunities currently exist through federal funding streams to expand services for older youth and learn more about youth outcomes. Steps that can be taken include:

- *Implement the Fostering Connections Act* to strengthen kinship care and adoption services as well as secure funds to strengthen collaboration with education and mental health care agencies.
- *Implement the National Youth in Transition Database* so that reforms focused on transition-age youth may be evaluated based on outcomes.
- *Assist service providers in obtaining funding to serve transitioning youth.* Juvenile justice and child welfare professionals can work with adult service providers using federal funds to ensure that services for youth eligible beyond the age of majority are targeted to address developmental shortcomings that may hinder adulthood success. Another option would be to work with service providers already serving these youth to

facilitate procurement of federal and state funding that would allow them to continue service provision to youth over the age of 18.

Recommendation 5: Develop policies and practices that support prevention and development of the specific skills and competencies necessary for adulthood success.

Youth need sufficient education and employment skills to become economically independent adults. Problems in either sphere may be exacerbated by unmet psychological or behavioral needs, but practices can be improved to prevent or remove the challenges agency-involved youth often face in their education and careers.

Juvenile justice practitioners and policymakers can implement a range of preventative and ameliorative practices, including:

- *Solidify connections with education agencies to reduce educational interruption and dropout rates.* Juvenile justice, child welfare, and crossover youth exhibit alarming rates of school failure and dropout.
- *Ensure that juvenile justice youth's special educational needs are met.* Dropping out is often connected to undiagnosed learning disabilities. Working with educators to identify and address learning disabilities early can help youth successfully complete secondary education.
- *Collaborate with educators to reduce school referrals.* Referrals from schools are an increasingly common path for youth into the juvenile justice system. Juvenile justice professionals and educators can respond to troubling behavior by creating an assessment tool that can identify learning disabilities, behavioral or mental health problems, and family issues. Addressing these issues early, outside of the juvenile court system, may increase the likelihood that a youth struggling with academic work or exhibiting troubling behavior will remain in—and finish—school.
- *Ensure that detained youth experience minimal educational interruption.* Because suspension and expulsion are common in this population, it can be a challenge for youth to return to the same school upon

release. Older youth, especially those over the age of compulsory school attendance, are in danger of not completing high school or continuing their education. Juvenile justice professionals should work to identify appropriate schools and other programs able to accommodate older youth, especially those in need of remedial instruction.

Child welfare practitioners and policymakers can also make changes to reduce educational failure among transition-age youth. Many of these changes can be financed by making better, more efficient use of federal funding streams. These changes include:

- **Fully implement the educational provisions of the *Fostering Connections Act***, which require states and tribes to keep youth in their schools when they must enter foster care and to promptly transfer records when youth must change schools. Use available federal funding to provide transportation to a youth's original school.
- **Use education-related funds available through the *Chafee Act*** to establish services to assist youth in completing high school or a GED and enrolling in college or in technical or vocational school.

Practices both juvenile justice and child welfare agencies can implement include:

- **Create partnerships with community colleges and other local postsecondary institutions** to ensure that transitioning youth have the information and support they need to enroll in and finance higher education. These partnerships must identify additional financial and other supports, such as tutoring, mental health, and related services that will increase student retention.
- **Solidify connections with local employers.** Youth who hold part-time jobs during their teenage years demonstrate greater adulthood employment success. Connecting youth with adequate employment upon aging out can lower the risk of homelessness and instability. Find local employers willing to interview, hire, and train juvenile justice, child welfare, and crossover youth. Developing relationships with employers will enable agencies to identify and address

individual behavioral problems or learning disabilities that might limit a youth's future career prospects.

- **Change rules in group care settings to allow for employment** to help youth build the vocational and professional social skills necessary for future success.
- **Plan for extended service provision after youth age out.** Any gains made in educational and vocational spheres may be derailed if chronic needs are unaddressed following agency involvement. Practitioners should ensure that transition-age youth in need of extended medical, educational, behavior health, and other services are able to access these services as adults in a manner that allows for seamless service provision.

Many publicly funded service providers have waiting lists. As a result, practitioners should work with adult-serving service providers well in advance of youth aging out to ensure that youth will be placed immediately.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen collaboration between the juvenile justice and child welfare systems to efficiently target service provision and improve outcomes for crossover youth.

Our understanding of the needs of crossover youth as they transition to adulthood is growing. Practice reforms should be based on prevention as the first strategy in serving crossover youth. Practices should focus on positive youth development and normalcy, particularly for youth in congregate care settings. A number of strategies can be implemented to advance these goals by strengthening collaboration between juvenile justice and child welfare, including:

- **Create information-sharing mechanisms to identify crossover youth.** Information sharing with triggers can provide information on a youth's status in both systems, eligibility for services, and status of service planning. Dependency and delinquency judges will be better able to shape case plans for transitioning youth if information on their experiences with other agencies is available.

Confidentiality provisions that prohibit data sharing across agencies may limit some information sharing.

Revising confidentiality laws or including educational, child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, and other history in an assessment would enable judges to mandate appropriate service provision for a youth and his or her family.

- ***Allow child welfare to retain jurisdiction for dually adjudicated youth.*** This may enable crossover youth to benefit from programs funded through the Chafee Act and the Fostering Connections Act. These programs are crucial where adulthood preparation or family-centered services are unavailable for older youth through the juvenile justice system.
- ***Dedicate resources to support the collaboration between juvenile justice and child welfare.*** This may include resources for cross-training programs, information-sharing systems, overarching case management, and the development of assessment tools that meet the needs of both agencies.
- ***Align the supervision of juvenile justice and the provision of behavioral health services by child welfare with the public safety risk and the child safety and well-being needs of dual-jurisdiction youth.*** Lower risk but high-need youth would potentially benefit from a division of labor in which child welfare involvement is relatively high and juvenile justice involvement is relatively low. High-public-safety-risk youth, who by definition have high criminogenic needs, would potentially benefit from high levels of involvement from both juvenile justice and child welfare. In no instance should a dual-jurisdiction youth be dropped from the caseload of child welfare unless the criminogenic and generalized needs cannot be addressed in any fashion by child welfare.

Recommendation 7: Engage with the community to create broad support systems for transitioning youth.

Agencies can develop community resources that are able to support youth throughout their transition to adulthood. Creating connections among older youth, their families, and community stakeholders while the youth is still

under an agency's care can provide the foundation for permanency, help struggling families support their young adult, and enable the youth to feel community acceptance, thus facilitating his or her integration into adult society. Agency professionals should:

- ***Work with existing social, civic, and faith-based organizations to increase public awareness of available agency services.*** Trust between the public and government systems of care needs to be cultivated.
- ***Engage community members in procurement decisions.*** Community engagement can help agencies identify the unique needs and challenges in the jurisdiction's high-risk communities. Working collaboratively with communities to help youth and their families meet these challenges will increase agency legitimacy and ensure that reforms are sustainable through broad-base support.

Adapting these recommendations to local circumstances can help agencies prepare juvenile justice and child welfare youth for adulthood. By working collaboratively, child welfare and juvenile justice agencies can help each other overcome the social, financial, and political challenges standing in the way of meaningful reform. Conceiving of transition-age youth in the broader social context can help professionals identify the supports they must cultivate to ensure adulthood success. Beginning collaboration around the needs and strengths of crossover youth will not only improve joint efforts between the systems, but also allow practitioners to recognize the cross-cutting needs in every youth struggling to mature into a successful adult. Through implementation of collaborative, developmentally appropriate, and youth-inclusive best practices, the cultural barriers that historically stymied a coordinated approach will begin to break down. Although meeting the challenges presented by transition-age youth seems daunting, acting decisively to do so will not only improve the lives of the young people we serve, but also improve the safety, cohesiveness, and productivity of their families and communities.