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Advocate

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Youth Transitioning from Care

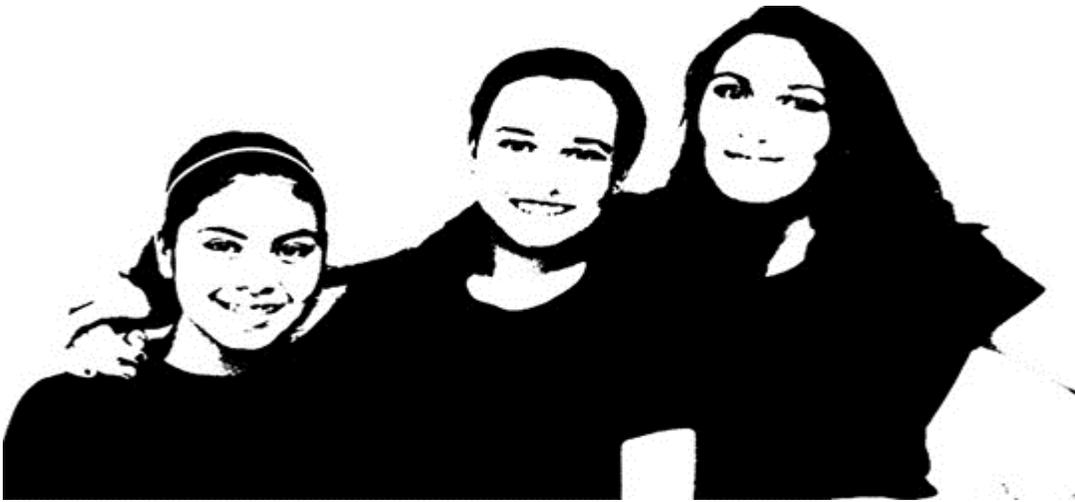
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Growing Up is Difficult



As we all know from experiences with young adults in our lives, and as a growing body of research confirms, the human brain continues to grow and develop well past the age of majority. Brain executive functions — good judgment and maturity — are among the last to develop in the mid-20s. For good or bad, the choices we make and the goals we set in youth regarding education, career and interpersonal relationships shape the opportunities and outcomes available to us later in life. For former foster youth, the challenge of that transition is even greater because they often lack the important emotional and financial support nurturing parents provide their adult children.

Many former foster youth experience homelessness, unplanned pregnancies or have encountered the criminal justice system because they aged out of custody without the proper tools to face the challenges of modern life most adults experience today. Extension of foster care services allows these youth the opportunity to complete or continue their education, with access to health care, housing assistance and other supports to help them succeed in life. The extended services also play an important role in achieving the goals Tennessee has set for improving graduation rates, increasing educational attainment, building stronger families and creating safer communities.

Prior to the advent of extension of foster care services, former foster youth were often left to fend for themselves upon aging out of state custody. Estranged from their families and lacking adequate education and social skills, many of these young people found themselves in dire circumstances, unable to meet their daily needs, continue their education, compete for jobs, find suitable housing or access adequate health or mental health care services.

Note: Much of this newsletter was written by Steve Petty and TCCY Executive Director Linda O'Neal.

Youth Transitions Advisory Council

The Youth Transitions Advisory Council (YTAC), now a TCCY program, was created to bring together service providers and child advocates from across the state to develop and help implement strategies to engage former foster youth as they transition to adulthood. TCCY inherited YTAC from the General Assembly's Select Committee on Children and Youth when the committee was dissolved in 2011. Each year in October, YTAC presents a summary of its work over the previous year and its recommendations for improvement to the Legislature. Much of the material in this newsletter is from the 2015 report.



YTAC is staffed by Steve Petty. Petty is TCCY's youth policy advocate and also tracks and shares information on legislation related to children, youth and families. He previously worked with TCCY's Children's Program Outcome Review Team and with the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

Youth Transitions Advisory Council 2016 Annual Report:
<http://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/tccy/attachments/yt-ar-15.pdf>

YTAC 2015 Overview

Transitioning Adults Accepting Extended Foster Care Services				
	Total Aged Out	Total Aged Out Eligible for EFCS	Eligible Population Accepting EFCS	Percent Accepting EFCS
FY 2008-09	1,209			
FY 2009-10	1,162			
FY 2010-11	1,131	813	163	20%
FY 2011-12	1,084	748	201	27%
FY 2012-13	1,017	768	301	39%
FY 2013-14	984	779	312	40%
FY 2014-15	932	731	353	48%

The number of youth participating in the Tennessee Department of Children's Services' (DCS) Extension of Foster Care services increased for the fifth consecutive year, while the number of youth aging out of state custody decreased for the fifth consecutive year. The rate of participation of those eligible for Extension of Foster Care Services rose from 20 percent in 2010 to 40 percent in 2014 and 48 percent in 2015.

The Education and Training Voucher, Bright Futures Scholarships and Hope Foster Care Grants to help youth with education costs all had increased utilization.

The Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS) has begun two programs to serve transition-age youth and young adults suffering from or at risk of serious emotional disturbance. The **Tennessee Healthy Transitions Initiative** will work with youth and young adults with or at risk of developing a serious mental health condition and/or co-occurring disorder in improving their health and wellness, leading self-directed lives, and reaching their full potential. The **Tennessee First Episode Psychosis Initiative** will serve adolescents and young adults between the ages of 15 and 30 experiencing psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations, unusual thoughts or beliefs, or disorganized thinking, with symptoms present for more than a week but less than six months. Both programs will initially be available in the Northwest Region, provided by Carey Counseling, Inc. Tennessee Healthy Transitions will also serve youth in Hamilton county, through Volunteer Behavior Health.

These two new initiatives are in addition to the **Treatment and Recovery for Youth (TRY)** grant. Awarded in 2013, the TRY grant serves adolescents and young adults in Maury and Madison counties who are suffering from substance abuse disorders. Through the first two years of the grant, TRY served approximately 165 youth and transition-age young adults using the Adolescent-Community Reinforcement Approach (A-CRA.)

Youth Villages Inc. continues to serve transition-age youth aging out of foster care. In 2014, through a partnership with Youth Villages, Tennessee became the first state in the nation to offer transitional services to all youth aging out of state custody. Results from a study of the Youth Villages program by Manpower Research Development Corporation (MRDC) found that participation in the program increased earnings by 17 percent, improved housing stability and economic well-being, decreasing the likelihood of homelessness by 22 percent.

Tennessee Housing and Development Agency (THDA) has put increased emphasis on serving former foster youth due to their high risk of homelessness. THDA provided funding for four programs serving transition age youth: Monroe Harding, Oasis Center, Crossroads Campus and Omni Community Services. With funding from THDA, Crossville Housing Authority completed work on a four-unit apartment to provide housing for youth aging out of state custody in the Upper Cumberland region.

Youth Villages, Manpower Research Development Corporation <http://bit.ly/1POi36B>.

2015 Achievements for Transitioning Youth

The YTAC report listed successes for transitioning foster youth last year. Among them were the following:

Financial Credit Issues. An earlier YTAC recommendation is being implemented. DCS has begun a process to do credit checks on foster youth to find if they are victims of identity theft or credit fraud.

Foster Care Review Boards. DCS contracted with the Administrative Office of the Courts to train local specialized foster care review boards. Thirteen peer advocates also supported youth with foster care review boards.

Housing. The Tennessee Housing and Development Agency (THDA) is participating with YTAC. In 2015, the Crossville Housing Authority built a four-unit apartment complex for transitioning youth in the Upper Cumberland Region. The report recommends THDA continue to expand housing assistance opportunities.

The 2015 report includes other accomplishments of the Council and its partners.

Resource Centers

Tennessee now has four Resource Centers in operation for youth aging out of foster care: Monroe Harding Youth Connections in Nashville, South Memphis Alliance in Memphis, Helen Ross McNabb Project Now in Knoxville, and the newest resource center in Chattanooga, I AM READY, just completed its first year of operation. All four resource centers provide life skills, asset management training through the Opportunity Passport, sexual health education, employment assistance, and other services unique to the needs of transitioning youth.

Youth Transitions Advisory Council 2016 Annual Report:

<http://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/tccy/attachments/yt-ar-15.pdf>

DCS Goals for Youth Leaving Care

Youth Who Met an Achievement Measure of Those Who Aged Out in 2014

Enrolled in High School or GED	273 (62%)
Obtained High School Diploma or GED	96 (22%)
Adult Service Transition	8 (2%)
Full-Time Employment or Vocational Training	7 (2%)
Enrolled in Post-Secondary	4 (1%)

Source: TFACTS Transitional Survey Monthly Reports, January through December 2014, and transitional survey case file review. *Brian A. Monitor's report.*

The Tennessee Department of Children's Services (DCS) has committed to ensuring more than 90 percent who are discharged from foster care shall have achieved a beginning toward self-sufficiency when they leave care. For calendar year 2014, DCS was near its 2015 goal, having reached 89.4 percent, its highest level ever. Achievements include at least one of the following:

- Earned a high-school equivalency degree;

- Have a high school diploma;
- Enrollment in high school, college, an approved alternative special needs education program, enrolled in a vocational education program or working full-time;

New Recommendations

Recommendations identified include:

Reasonable and Prudent Parenting. Changes need to be made to allow foster parents to make decisions regarding normal, day-to-day events, such as extracurricular activities and overnights, as they would for their own children.

Early Intervention. A focus should be on beginning preparations for transitions with youth ages 14 to 16 years.

Immigration Issues. The report recommends increased awareness of implications of immigration status and clearly establishing immigration status for youth before they turn 18.

Transition-Age Youth at Risk of Custody. Youth who have received services to avoid entering state custody also need essential supports.

Pregnancy Prevention. DCS should implement best practices for pregnancy prevention, including long-acting, reversible contraceptives.

Legal Issues. Transitioning youth need assistance with legal issues.

The 2015 report includes other new recommendations, as well as recommendations identified in earlier years.

Legislative Changes Affecting Foster Youth

Two laws were enacted in the 2015 session of the General Assembly addressing barriers youth in foster care face.

Driver’s Licenses. A foster parent or other “authorized representative” of DCS can now sign a financial responsibility form paving the way for youth to get a Tennessee driver’s license.

High School Graduation Credits. Youth in state custody frequently move among school districts. The state has set a minimum number of academic credits required to receive a diploma, but some districts have added requirements. The new law allows youth who entered state custody in the 11th or 12th grade to graduate if they meet state minimum standards even if the system into which they have been placed requires more.

Get information on Tennessee legislation, TCCY newsletters, etc., by signing up using instructions at <http://www.tn.gov/tccy/article/leg-listserv>.

Short History of Foster Care

Rules for caring for children without families date back to the beginning of the Judeo-Christian tradition thousands of years ago, experts say. The child welfare system on this continent may have begun with the fostering of a child in the Jamestown settlement; it became more organized and professional during the 20th century and after World War II. Foster care was viewed as temporary, as contrasted to adoption, a permanent solution.

In the 1940s only one in four U.S. citizens age 25 had earned a high school diploma. Over time,

that percentage has grown steadily. By 1980, nearly 70 percent of 25-year-olds had a diploma. A law establishing a minimum age for work was passed in 1938.

Although current understanding of brain development reveals executive brain function, including judgment, does not develop until after age 20, younger people had more financial responsibilities in earlier times. However, the global modern world of competing technologies and communication makes it more difficult for young people to be self sufficient at age 18.

Historically, children whose family relationships were severed when they entered state custody and who were not placed in a permanent home were on their own when they reached the age when the state's responsibility ended.

TCCY Accepting Federal Formula Grant Applications

Tennessee Commission on Children (TCCY) is accepting new applications for Federal Formula Grant funding for projects beginning in 2016.

Funds will be awarded for projects that support, enhance, develop or implement innovative programs that focus on one of the following program categories which include Delinquency Prevention, System Improvements and Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC).

Application are due January 12, 2016. A copy of the application can be found at tn.gov/tccy/article/jj-grants-FFG.

Chaffee Foster Care Independence Program

In 1999, Congress passed the Chaffee Act creating the Foster Care Independence Program to help current and former foster youth achieve self-sufficiency. The program funds activities to support a successful transition to adulthood. It serves youth who are likely to remain in foster care until age 18, youth 16 or older who left foster care for kinship care or guardianship and youth ages 18 to 21 who have aged out of foster care.

States apply for Chaffee Fund grants. Tennessee has applied for and receives these funds.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau, **John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program**: <http://1.usa.gov/1HVWXN6>.

Governor's Children's Cabinet Establishes New Awards to Be Presented at 2016 Children's Advocacy Days

The Governor's Children's Cabinet has created new awards to honor innovative ways to assure communities, schools and families prepare the state's children to enter school. Governor's Awards for Excellence in Early Foundations, which will be presented at the 2016 Children's Advocacy Days, include three organizational award categories and six individual innovator award categories, each sponsored by one of the Children's Cabinet departments. All nominations must be submitted to the Governor's Children's Cabinet by 5:00 p.m. CST on January 15, 2016.

Awards include:

- Excellence in Promoting Physical Activity (Health);
- Excellence in Building Resiliency (Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services);
- Excellence in Promoting Early Literacy (Education);
- Excellence in Keeping Kids Safe, Healthy, and On Track (Children's Services);
- Excellence in Promoting Wellness (Health Care Finance and Administration/TennCare);
- Excellence in Promoting High Quality Early Care and Education Programs (Human

Services).

Tennessee State Government Newsroom, "**Tennessee Children's Cabinet Creates Governor's Awards for Excellence in Early Foundations**,": <http://1.usa.gov/1MNopIM>.

Office of the Governor, "**2016 Governor's Awards for Excellence in Early Foundations nomination form**," <http://1.usa.gov/1H4Uwgk>.

Updates

Rev. Audrey Taylor Gonzalez, TCCY Commission member, was named **Local Hero** and "**Angel of Memphis**" by Memphis ABC TV-24.

TCCY Associate Director **Richard Kennedy** graduated from the **Tennessee Government Executive Institute (TGEI)**, a leadership training program provided through the Department of Human Resources.

Mark Your Calendar

Dec. 2-3, **Tennessee Association of Mental Health Organizations (TAMHO) Annual Conference**, Embassy Suites Hotel, Murfreesboro. Contact <http://www.tamho.org/> for information.

Dec. 3, 9 a.m.-11:30 a.m., Urban Child Institute Auditorium, 600 Jefferson Ave # 200, Memphis, Memphis/Shelby County Children and Youth Council sponsors "**Sex Trafficking of Minors, Part 2: Resources Available to Victims and Survivors**." Register at <http://bit.ly/1MRsQrs>.

Dec. 4, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., **East Tennessee Council on Children and Youth Legislative Council Meeting and Lunch**, Family Justice Center Auditorium, 400 Harriet Tubman, Knoxville. Information: Lindsey.Cody@tn.gov.

Dec. 4, 9:15 a.m.-12 p.m., **South Central/Southeast Councils on Children and Youth Legislative Brunch**, Tennessee Army National Guard Building, 1402 E. Carroll St., Tullahoma. Register at <http://bit.ly/1jhqESL> Information Rosalyn.Leavell-Rice@tn.gov or Shaun.Noblit@tn.gov.

Dec. 4, 8:15 a.m.-1:45 p.m., Northwest Council on Children and Youth, "**I Thought I Was a People Person...Until I Started Working with People: Humor: Helping Ourselves and Our Clients Navigate Stress**," Boling University Center, 2nd Floor, Ballroom, UT Martin. Information: Dana.Cobb@tn.gov.

March 8-9, **Children's Advocacy Days**, War Memorial Auditorium. Contact (615) 741-2633.

In the News

Cason, Stephanie, *Tennessee News Service*, "**TN Juvenile Justice Reform: State Works toward Therapeutic Approach**," <http://bit.ly/1QehPqR>.

Johnson, Steve, *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, "**A home for teens too old for foster care**," <http://bit.ly/1SE95su>.

Pew Charitable Trusts, *Data Visualization*, "Juvenile Commitment Rate Drops 53%," <http://bit.ly/1MagdKO>.

Research Information

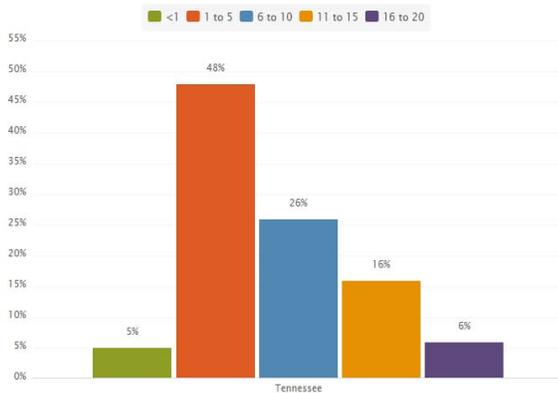
Poushter, Pew Research Center, "Measuring the "good" life around the world," <http://pewsr.ch/1MxOfGU>.

Schiff, Maria, Pew Charitable Trusts,, "Substance Use Disorder and the Role of States," <http://bit.ly/1ONsh8p>.

Tucker, Joan, et al., Rand Corporation. *Research Briefs*, "Reducing Cigarette Smoking Among Unaccompanied Homeless Youth," <http://bit.ly/1MRGOJP>.

Tennessee KIDS COUNT Facts

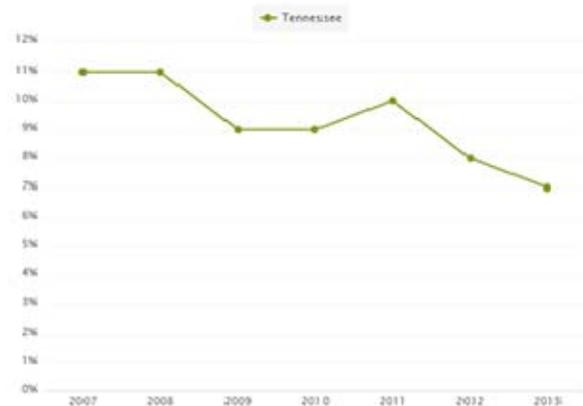
Children in Child Welfare System Who Have Been Adopted (By Age Group)



CHILDREN IN CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM WHO HAVE BEEN ADOPTED BY AGE GROUP: 5 SELECTED (PERCENT) - 2013

National KIDS COUNT
KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org
A project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation

Children Exiting Foster Care by Emancipation (2007-2013)



CHILDREN EXITING FOSTER CARE BY EXIT REASON: EMANCIPATION (PERCENT)

National KIDS COUNT
KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org
A project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation

More data on Tennessee child well-being are available at <http://bit.ly/15alkVu>.

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