



# Supporting Foster Youth Transitions to Adulthood

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## The Challenge

Every year, tens of thousands of older youth living in foster families and group homes approach the age when their formal ties to foster care end and they must adjust to a more independent adulthood.

Following this major life transition, the difficulties these “emancipated” young adults often encounter can jeopardize their health and well-being, and generate problems and associated costs for the communities in which they reside. When older youth make the transition from foster care to independent living, generally at age 18, they face high risks of becoming homeless; giving up on their education; being unemployed and relying on public services or benefits to survive; having children at a young age; or engaging in criminal activities as they seek to make it on their own. In each of these instances, the consequences for communities are significant and often end up on the proverbial doorstep of city hall.

While most city governments do not play a role in administering the foster care system, municipal leaders increasingly recognize the importance of helping foster youth become stable, contributing members of the community. Young people who have transitioned out of foster care are concentrated in cities and constitute sizable segments of the at-risk youth populations that cities seek to reach through a wide range of education, employment and training, homelessness, health and crime prevention initiatives. When city leaders thoughtfully anticipate the needs of transitioning foster youth and work collaboratively to address service gaps, they reap the benefits of a more stable, educated and productive workforce, safer streets and neighborhoods and decreased demand for emergency and other public services.

## POLICY OVERVIEW

### Program Administration

- The day-to-day administration, licensing and oversight of foster care placements and transitional living plans vary from state to state, but are generally overseen by states (or in 14 states by counties) through departments of social or family services.
- The federal government disburses federal child welfare funds and provides ongoing monitoring of foster care and transition support programs through the Children’s Bureau, which is part of the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The U.S. Department of Labor has also developed tools and recommendations for workforce preparation for the large proportion of foster youth who have developmental disabilities.

### Funding

- States and the federal government share responsibility for funding the foster care system under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. State-level “qualifying expenditures” determine the size of the federal contribution.
- Federal law requires state and local child welfare systems to reimburse foster parents and group home providers for

the cost of providing children’s basic needs; state governments develop those reimbursement formulas.

- The 1999 Chafee Foster Care Independence Act authorized distinct programs and doubled funding to support foster youth who are planning for and making transitions to adulthood, including assistance with education, employment, financial management, housing, and connections to caring adults. At the state and local level, these federally-supported efforts are typically known as Independent Living Programs.
- The Chafee Act also provides Education and Training Vouchers worth up to \$5,000 per fiscal year, administered by states, for former foster youth attending postsecondary education and vocational programs.

### Recent Policy Changes

- In 2008, Congress passed the Fostering Connection to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, which extended various Title IV-E benefits for youth between the ages of 18 and 21, such as funding age-appropriate, semi-independent living settings.



## Strategies

City leaders can take steps — in partnership with state and county agencies and local service providers — to ensure that adequate guidance, support and positive opportunities are made available to older foster youth approaching the age of emancipation and continue for several years after youth have exited the foster care system. Key strategies for cities to consider include:

- *Become knowledgeable about local foster youth transitions and use this information to set goals and track progress over time.* A clear understanding of the needs of foster youth and current gaps in the system will allow a municipal leader to utilize existing services more effectively, build public will and engage in collaborative planning with state, county and community-based agencies. Further, city officials can use this information to set goals and track progress related to transitioning foster youth, either independently or within a broader city plan for children, youth and families.
- *Connect transitioning foster youth to existing programs and services.* Cities can make the most of current investments by giving priority to transitioning foster youth in transitional or supportive housing programs, employment and training initiatives

or city jobs and internships. Municipal officials can also recruit these youth to participate in local programs that support their educational and personal development.

- *Make the case for supporting foster youth transitions to adulthood.* City officials are well-positioned to help others understand how poorly-supported transitions to adulthood can imperil the well-being of foster youth and undermine the community’s quality of life. By providing a vision of how the community can promote successful transitions, mayors and other city leaders can build public will, engage new partners and solicit the funding and in-kind support necessary to sustain future progress.
- *Take a cross-system approach to service planning and delivery.* Because the needs of transitioning foster youth are too broad to be addressed by a single program, agency or level of government — and because city governments rarely play lead roles in administering the foster care system — it is important to take a cross-system approach to planning and implementing services, and to consider a one-stop approach to service delivery.

## Action Steps

### 1. Become knowledgeable about local foster youth transitions and use this information to set goals and track progress over time.

As day-to-day administration of foster care is generally the responsibility of the state or county, an early step for city leaders may be simply to become more knowledgeable about transitioning foster youth in the community. Mayors or other city leaders can request a briefing — or just ask for city or county-level data — from the public agency that provides child welfare services and operates the Independent Living program. Other governmental entities, such as school districts, housing authorities and workforce boards, may also be sources of valuable information. To get a more complete picture, city leaders can also convene focus groups to obtain input directly from older foster youth and young adults who have recently left the child welfare system.

To learn more, municipal officials can start with basic factual questions, such as:

- How many foster youth transition to independence each year? Of these transitioning youth, what proportion has lived in foster family settings and what proportion has come out of group homes?
- What is known about the living arrangements of former foster youth?
- Once they have left the child welfare system, how many youth are employed or in school? How many are engaged in mentoring or youth programs?
- How many transitioning youth utilize a local Independent

Living Program to coordinate access to services? How many are not getting help with transitions, and what is known about this unserved group?

- Which local agencies, other than child welfare, are already providing services or engaged in outreach to transitioning foster youth?
- What committees or task forces, if any, are focused on transitioning foster youth, and what role are city leaders or city agencies playing in those groups?

Armed with an appreciation of the facts, city leaders can move on to questions that require analysis or interpretation, such as:

- What are the major issues transitioning foster youth face in this community?
- What are the areas where outcomes could be improved?
- What efforts are under way to close gaps in services?
- Has there been any evaluation of existing efforts? What has been done to expand successful models or improve ineffective efforts?
- What role could city leaders or municipal agencies play in advancing solutions?

With a better understanding of the needs of transitioning foster youth, city leaders can set measurable goals — on their own or through cross-system planning efforts with other partners — and can promote accountability by monitoring progress toward these goals.

In San Francisco, Mayor Gavin Newsom's Transitional Youth Task Force, which includes more than 10 city/county agencies and partners, developed specific goals and targets for providing employment and housing opportunities. Now a permanent interagency council known as the Transitional Age Youth Initiative, one of its key roles is to collaborate and monitor progress on action steps recommended by the Task Force.

Unfortunately, city-level data on the status of transitioning foster youth and the programs that serve them are not always available. While good information can help local initiatives target resources where they are most needed, city officials can undertake meaningful efforts in the absence of detailed information by connecting vulnerable foster youth to the supports that research has shown are most often lacking for this population: housing, employment and training, education and positive adult connections.

### *Summary of City Leadership Opportunities*

- Become informed about local foster youth and their needs in areas such as housing, jobs, training, education and connections to caring adults.
- Learn about relevant state and county-run supports for transitioning foster youth.
- Identify what changes are needed in the system and set concrete goals for action, either specifically for city government or in collaboration with state, county or nonprofit agencies.
- Track outcomes and encourage ongoing youth feedback to measure impact and improve efforts over time.

## **2. Connect transitioning foster youth to existing programs and services.**

Cities may already provide a wide array of services that can help support foster youth transitions. A key task in this regard is to establish successful transitions for foster youth as a priority in municipal programs and operations, and to think creatively about the use of existing city resources. Cities can look at ways to help support transition planning for older foster youth who often move among foster homes and group homes and can offer “try-out” work experiences, adult mentors and positive youth development programming in the years prior to emancipation. As foster youth reach the age of emancipation and for several years thereafter, cities can play an important role in helping youth secure housing, jobs, adult mentors, access to health and mental health services and continuing education and training.

Housing is a major need for emancipated foster youth, many of whom experience unstable housing or homelessness in the years immediately following their exit from foster care. Cities often directly control or have significant influence through public housing authorities over the utilization of housing and homelessness funding — such as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), HOME Continuum of Care, McKinney-Vento funds, and Section 8 vouchers. City leaders can give priority to transitioning foster youth who seek housing assistance, provide grants to programs that serve emancipated foster youth and use zoning reviews to ensure that these youth can gain access to subsidized or affordable units. The City of Fremont, Calif., for instance, has combined federal CDBG funds with tenant-based

rental assistance (TBRA) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's HOME program and city general revenues to provide transitional housing for youth emancipating from foster care. Similarly, in Fresno, Calif., the city is directing a large share of developer impact fees to help construct a new transitional housing complex for foster youth.

Employment is another priority for newly independent foster youth. City representatives often sit on local workforce development agency boards and can explore opportunities to make specific investments in job training for youth transitioning from foster care. Cities can also offer internships or jobs for youth within municipal government, either before or after emancipation.

Access to public benefits can be important for emancipated youth as well. Cities that already support efforts to connect low-income residents to available aid — including the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), and WIC program — or that provide Individual Development Accounts or similar matched savings vehicles can look for opportunities to help transitioning foster youth determine if they would be eligible. Eligibility is especially likely for transitioning foster youth who have children of their own.

To address educational needs, city leaders can build on existing partnerships with local school systems to help young people stay in school and avoid disruptions caused by multiple foster care placements in the years leading up to emancipation. In collaboration with the child welfare system, local community college and workforce board, cities can also encourage foster youth to pursue postsecondary education and training, including by actively promoting utilization of the federally funded Education and Training Vouchers for foster youth and other financial assistance to cover higher education expenses.

Finally, municipal parks and recreation programs that promote positive youth development can work with child welfare agencies to recruit and enroll older and emancipated foster youth, and city leaders can encourage municipal staff to become mentors to foster youth in transition by providing them with time off or scheduling flexibility to support these efforts. In Dallas, the city offers employees up to one paid hour each week to mentor at-risk youth.

### *Summary of City Leadership Opportunities*

- Set aside slots for foster youth in housing, employment and other relevant city programs, or create a preference system to increase their likelihood of receiving needed services.
- Target transitioning foster youth in local outreach efforts to help ensure that low-income residents receive the federal EITC, nutrition assistance, free or low-cost health insurance, matched savings accounts and other benefits for which they are eligible.
- Instruct city agencies to identify and pursue strategies for connecting transitioning foster youth — before and after the age of emancipation — to youth programs currently operating in the community.
- Recruit city employees as mentors and allow for flexible work schedules to support mentoring activities.



### 3. Make the case for supporting foster youth transitions to adulthood.

When city leaders serve as champions, they can build public will, engage new partners and lay the groundwork for soliciting new resources. Mayors and other city officials can use their influence to generate a broad base of support for efforts to address the challenges that youth aging out of foster care face. They can emphasize that these efforts help vulnerable young people develop the competencies and social attributes needed to fully assume their roles as workers, citizens, parents and taxpayers in the modern global economy.

At the same time, municipal officials can clearly communicate the cost of inaction for individuals and the entire community. Nearly one-third of the nation's homeless adults report a foster care history, and one national survey of foster youth who had been out of the child welfare system for between two-and-a-half and four years showed that one-quarter of respondents reported being homeless for at least one night. In the same survey, only about half of former foster youth had completed high school and just over one-third had maintained employment for a full year, while 60 percent of young women had children shortly after leaving foster care.

The case for increasing support for foster youth in transition becomes even stronger when a mayor or city councilmember not only describes the challenge, but also sets forth a vision of how to improve outcomes for these young people. A city may choose to focus on solutions specifically for foster youth in transition, look at the needs of a wider array of youth who are disconnected from school and work or address the needs of transitioning foster youth within a broader community plan to support and strengthen all children, youth and families. The critical element is providing a set of goals and a framework for action around which potential partners and funders can coalesce.

Local elected officials can use these messages to bring new partners to the table and encourage corporate and philanthropic leaders to help fill gaps in the system of support for youth transitioning out of foster care. In addition, the city can help generate support from the community through any coordinated city efforts to help citizens connect to local volunteer opportunities.

#### *Summary of City Leadership Opportunities*

- Use the bully pulpit to raise awareness of the needs of transitioning foster youth.
- Highlight the risks facing these young people and the potential payoff — for individuals and the city — of supporting successful transitions to independence.
- Ask corporate and philanthropic leaders for additional resources — funding, volunteers or in-kind support — for programs working with youth transitioning out of foster care.

### 4. Take a cross-system approach to service planning and delivery.

Given the broad range of needs among foster youth, the most effective efforts to serve this population involve cross-system partnerships. In addition to city and child welfare agencies, other key partners include housing authorities, workforce investment boards, public health agencies and school districts. City leaders can also ensure that

that the “youth voice” is valued by promoting effective engagement of current and former foster youth in various policy, planning and decision-making processes.

As in most cross-system efforts, city leaders have the opportunity to provide leadership through their powers to convene, jointly fund and promote. In some cases, these partnerships may focus on addressing a particular need — such as housing or employment — for emancipated foster youth. In a growing number of California cities, for example, city and county housing agencies have come together to expand the availability of housing units specifically designed for transitioning foster youth.

In other communities, municipal leaders may want to ensure that the city is represented on a broader task force or coalition conducting comprehensive planning to promote successful foster youth transitions, or may launch such an effort if strategic partners are not yet working together on this issue. San Francisco's Transitional Age Youth Initiative represents an example of municipal leadership to initiate cross-system planning.

In addition to coordinated planning and program implementation, a cross-system group can bring together financial resources to meet identified needs. A city's development or grants office may be able to help the group identify funding and in-kind resources available from the corporate and philanthropic sector and help with the preparation of proposals. City budget staff may also be able to help the group identify options for combining funds from different city agencies or “braiding” city funding with a variety of other funding streams.

A final advantage to cross-system planning is that partners can work together to deliver counseling, services, and referrals at a single location that can become a “one-stop” support center for foster youth before and after they have left the child welfare system. Municipal leaders can help identify city services that can be made available in such a setting and may identify underutilized city buildings to house “one-stop” centers. In collaboration with Harris County and the Texas Workforce Commission, the City of Houston launched the Houston Alumni and Youth (HAY) Center, which serves as a hub of services and resources for foster youth transitioning to adulthood. These services, provided by 12 key partners, include employment training, counseling, housing assistance, on-site case managers, GED classes, mentoring and access to computers and individual voicemail services.

#### *Summary of City Leadership Opportunities*

- Seek opportunities for city representation on local, regional and state working groups that are focused on or could be helpful in addressing the needs of foster youth.
- Launch a cross-system planning and program implementation group if one does not exist.
- Ensure the presence of “youth voice” in relevant planning processes.
- Look for opportunities to blend or braid funding from multiple sources.
- Identify municipal facilities that could be converted into one-stop centers to support young people who are preparing for or making the transition from foster care to independent living.

## Resources

City officials seeking to play a leadership role to ensure positive outcomes for transitioning foster youth will need to be prepared to collaborate with county and state governments. The following are some national organizations that have developed successful models or published relevant guides that city leaders may find useful in meeting the needs of foster youth in transition:

**Casey Family Programs** has developed assessment tools and promising models for both system-wide reform and individual transition planning. One such tool is the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment, which is available for free online and focuses on the strengths needed to design and carry out an independent living plan.

[www.casey.org/OurWork/Transition](http://www.casey.org/OurWork/Transition)

**Child Welfare Information Gateway** provides access to federal information and other resources to help older youth access independent living services.

[www.childwelfare.gov/outofhome/independent](http://www.childwelfare.gov/outofhome/independent)

**Cities-Counties-Schools Partnership of California** has compiled a “Transitioning Foster Youth Guide” with examples of what cities and their key partners are doing, as well as a 15-point Roadmap to Action. [www.ccspartnership.org/T\\_transitioningFosterY.cfm](http://www.ccspartnership.org/T_transitioningFosterY.cfm)

**Foster Care Alumni of America** is a national network of foster care alumni aimed at transforming policy and practice, ensuring opportunity for people in and from the foster care system. City leaders may find it beneficial to launch a local chapter or engage with an existing one for the purpose of increasing adult mentors, adoptions and permanent employment options for youth in transition.

[www.fostercarealumni.org](http://www.fostercarealumni.org)

**Honoring Emancipated Youth (HEY)** is one example, based in San Francisco, of a slowly growing number of local organizations dedicated to strengthening and connecting systems of support so that youth emancipating, or “aging out,” of the foster care system can enjoy a healthy transition to adulthood. Among other activities, HEY produced a document providing thorough, practical advice on how to find and keep housing, available at

[www.heysf.org/pdfs/HEYGuideHousing2009.pdf](http://www.heysf.org/pdfs/HEYGuideHousing2009.pdf).

**Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative** has engaged 12 communities in developing promising models for transition, which are available online to promote peer learning and replication. One element of the Jim Casey approach is The Opportunity Passport.<sup>TM</sup> This tool

helps participants learn financial management, obtain experience with the banking system, manage an Individual Development Account (IDA), and gain access to educational, training, and vocational opportunities. [www.jimcaseyyouth.org](http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org)

**National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development** provides training and technical assistance to publicly administered and supported child welfare agencies through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Children’s Bureau, and maintains an expansive clearinghouse of policy and practice briefs for those interested in foster care transitions.

[www.nrcys.ou.edu/yd](http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/yd)

**National Foster Care Coalition** provides technical assistance, trainings, and information on a variety of issues, including permanence, transition, education and child welfare financing.

[www.nationalfostercare.org](http://www.nationalfostercare.org)

**National Association of Counties** published policy briefs on federal and state frameworks for foster youth transitions, which include model county programs and practices and describe how local policies can benefit positive transitions. [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org)

**New Ways to Work’s Youth Transition Action Team** is an approach that several California counties are following, sometimes with city participation, to bring together the resources of the workforce, education, and child welfare systems to better prepare foster youth to transition into the adult world.

[www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat.html](http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat.html)

**Youth Transition Funders Group’s Foster Care Work Group** consists of philanthropies using their grantmaking capacity to explore new ways to help foster youth complete an education that leads to lifelong careers and develop financial management skills and assets. Through its signature “Connected by 25” initiative, the work group has invested in and learned from successes in seven communities nationwide. [www.financeproject.org/special/practice/fcwg.cfm](http://www.financeproject.org/special/practice/fcwg.cfm)

**Youth Transitions Resource Center**, managed by The Finance Project, offers a wide array of publications on topics such as education, workforce, financial literacy, savings and asset building, entrepreneurship and permanency, as well as links to other organizations working on this topic. [www.financeproject.org/index.cfm?page=32](http://www.financeproject.org/index.cfm?page=32)

## Examples of Programs

### HOUSING ASSISTANCE

**Fremont, Calif.** (pop. 203,000) – This suburban city “blends and braids” three funding sources to provide transitional housing for emancipated foster youth. These sources include CDBG social services grants, tenant-based rental assistance (TBRA) funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s HOME program and city general revenues. With funding from those sources,

Project Independence provides rent subsidies and case management for up to three years for transitioning foster youth. City support for Project Independence began in 2002 with \$151,000 in TBRA and by 2006 had grown to \$207,000 to assist a minimum of 15 participants for up to 36 months. Fremont has also drawn upon CDBG and general funds to help support development of the local Rotary Club’s Bridgeway apartment complex, which includes eight units set aside for transitioning foster youth. [www.tricityhomeless.org](http://www.tricityhomeless.org)



**Corpus Christi, Texas** (pop. 277,000) – To provide better access to housing for the 150 young people who reach transition age each year, the City of Corpus Christi Housing Authority and Foster Youth Life Investment Partners (FYLIP) teamed up to open a conveniently located one-stop center that prioritized foster youth for a certain number of housing vouchers. On a daily basis, young people visiting the center can get access to emergency resources and basic services, such as housing information, educational guidance, employment help, counseling and self-awareness classes. Through this partnership, the Corpus Christi Housing Authority can better identify and reach the youth that will be looking for affordable housing, and the city has set aside five Section 8 vouchers for use by young people who receive services via the center. Governed by a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between FYLIP and the city, additional partners have also come forth, such as local universities and colleges that offer housing and meal plan scholarships to former foster youth who enroll in the schools. [www.fyลิป.org](http://www.fyลิป.org)

## EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

**New York City** (pop. 8,008,000) – Aware of the job search challenges of foster youth, municipal leaders in New York City have created Passport To Success, an intensive 16-week education and work readiness program sparked by a U.S. Department of Labor demonstration grant, sustained by support from Casey Family Programs and operated in conjunction with the city’s Administration for Childrens Services. After being referred and qualified for “membership,” youth benefit from individualized life coaches, intensive job training and job placement assistance. Membership also includes enrollment in pre-GED/GED preparation classes, life skills training, and career de-

velopment workshops. The Passport program is co-located in The Door, the city’s successful one-stop center for street and homeless youth. The Door currently serves more than 7,000 youth per year, 25 percent of those being current and former foster youth. This co-location also allows the city to provide these transitioning foster youth with primary health care services, counseling and legal support. [www.door.org](http://www.door.org)

## EDUCATIONAL TRANSITIONS

**San Francisco** (pop. 777,000) – In San Francisco, foster youth who are in high school and approaching the age of transition benefit from an interagency agreement among the city and county, school district, juvenile courts and state child welfare agency to help provide better coordination by city agencies and a seamless transition from one school to another when they are placed in a new home. An average foster youth may make several school transfers, often in different jurisdictions, and face administrative hassles related to delays in the transfer of transcripts, case management records and college planning documents. This agreement, which is managed by a Foster Youth Service Coordinator based at the school district, has led to improved coordination of data and has brought about specialized training of caregivers, school officials, and city and county personnel, such as the city’s Independent Living Skills program staff. Most critically, this collaborative places social work interns in each high school to help prepare students for emancipation and connect with the appropriate services available from the city and county human services department. As a result of this agreement, foster youth are better positioned to graduate on time and transition to higher education or join the workforce.

## ACHIEVING INDEPENDENCE CENTER:

### *A Foster Care Transition One-Stop Center for the City of Philadelphia*

In Philadelphia (pop. 1,518,000), hundreds of young people age out of the foster care system annually. To address the many challenges of this transition, the city’s Department of Human Services (DHS) sought a customer-friendly solution that focused on the full range of supports necessary for successful transitions, with a particular emphasis on employment.

Working alongside the Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation (PWDC), the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (PDHS), and the nonprofit Philadelphia Youth Network, DHS designed the Achieving Independence Center (AI Center), a centrally-located gateway to services that meet the individual needs of youth aging out of foster care. AI Center’s state-of-the-art facility provides tools and resources, job placement assistance and in-house job training. Youth can access these services during non-traditional hours, as the center offers flexible scheduling for both in-school and out-of-school youth.

### **Successful Elements**

Key to their design was a “one-stop” center that would provide wrap-around services in a central location, minimizing the need for youth to have to “office-hop.” Participating youth appreciate having access to a single, comprehensive set of services for their diverse needs, rather than receiving referrals to a variety of different agencies.

The relationship between agencies and clients is another essential element. Youth served through the AI Center are considered “members” and must qualify for membership and adhere to certain responsibilities. Once approved, transitioning foster youth select the services they need and want, earn rewards for completing goals, and feel more ownership in the center.

With this membership model as a backdrop, the delivery of services begins with an orientation, individualized assessment, and the development of a coaching-mentoring relationship with the youth. In a “hub and spoke” model, both members and their coaches determine which tracks of services (or spokes) they will utilize in their goal to achieve independence; this forms the basis for a Member Development Plan.

The center's environment is also one that is not typical of a government agency. Its convenient location and flexible hours make it a desirable place to seek services. The center's atmosphere is informal and the coaches and mentors work hard to build trust among the youth. Undoubtedly, the center's appeal is also due to the things that attract and motivate kids: computers, space to hang out and rewards for meeting milestones.

### Key Partners

Focusing on employability and practical tools for successful independent living, the AI Center has been effective in providing much needed services through strategic partnerships. This has allowed not only for better specialization but also a broader funding base to support the high level of services AI offers.

After designing a conceptual plan with its agency partners, DHS issued a request for proposals and partnered with Arbor Education and Training, a private firm well known for its work with welfare and workforce delivery programs, as the program manager. In its manager role, Arbor worked with DHS to coordinate a total of 13 co-located agencies, each with a unique service offering. Some of the most successful partnerships have allowed foster youth to benefit from the following services:

- **Employment:** The Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation provides on-site services to help youth prepare for and connect to part-time and full-time employment.
- **Housing:** The Women's Community Resources Program provides education and assistance regarding affordable housing, negotiating a lease, and the importance of good credit.
- **Hands-On Job Training:** Goodwill Industries operates the hospitality skills training program, along with a fully-functional "Independence Café," serving the general public. Youth work alongside staff and over time become qualified for employment in the hospitality industry.
- **Academic Tutoring and College Planning:** Temple University provides foster youth with remediation tutoring, GED instruction, counseling to select a college, and assistance with scholarship and financial aid applications.
- **Mentoring:** PathwaysPA and Temple University provide youth with an opportunity to be matched with caring male and female role models who provide networking opportunities and timely advice.
- **Computer Training:** The Community College of Philadelphia conducts classes in computer applications to help improve academic performance at two multi-station computer/Internet labs within the AI Center.
- **Healthy Relationships:** Planned Parenthood provides education about health awareness, relationships, and sexuality.

### Funding and Other Resources

Initial funding for the AI Center was provided by the Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation and the Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS), utilizing federal Chafee Independent Living funds. Other funds include general revenue from the City of Philadelphia, Workforce Investment Act funding and other workforce sources. The AI Center has also leveraged funds for its services and programs from the McKinney-Vento Act, Ryan White Care Act, Child Welfare League of America and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. The AI Center is a prime example of a successful city-led partnership that has made use of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, made available by the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. This legislation provides federal funding for independent living services and directs states to provide services to youth who leave foster care once they reach 18 years of age.

### Successes and Challenges

Given the poor outcomes for so many youth aging out of foster care, Philadelphia's AI Center has achieved impressive results. Since opening in December 2002, approximately;

- 3,300 new "members" have been served;
- 750 youth have obtained full- or part-time employment at an average wage of \$7.67 per hour;
- 650 members have enrolled in college or other post-secondary schools;
- 600 or more have graduated from high school or received a GED; and
- 37 have graduated from higher education.



Current and former foster youth are also “voting with their feet” in favor of the AI Center. Despite being a government program, young people consider the center a cool place to hang out. On any given weeknight, the center is extremely popular with its members and is usually crowded. The challenge of running a “one-stop” center with many providers, each with a different focus, is consistently maintaining good communications across multiple systems. As the managing partner, Arbor is actively installing a quality management system, which involves flow charting key processes, controlling provider “hand-offs” and maintaining a disciplined documentation system. The objective is to make the transition from foster care to self-sufficiency a “controlled process” that more consistently leads to successful outcomes for youth and for the broader community.

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