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Ensuring Successful Foster Care Transitions

All young people face barriers to independence as they move into adulthood, whether in the foster care system or not. When young people leave foster care, many have not had the kind of experiences and successes that will help in their transition. Some have no one to help, resulting in a lack of concrete and social resources that leads to discouraging outcomes: according to a recent report by the Annie E Casey Foundation, by the time young people involved in Michigan foster care turn 21, only two in five of them have full or part-time employment, and only two thirds of them have even a high school diploma or GED. All of these indicators are even worse for African American and Native American young people in care. These youth rely on the state to invest in their futures—we are failing Michigan's children if we allow them to fall through the cracks.

Navigating the world of adulthood is daunting, particularly without a thick safety net of family or other supportive adults. The Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI) serves young people, ages 14-21, currently or formerly in foster care, offering peer mentorship and support groups, along with asset-building opportunities and financial literacy, life skills, and other necessary training.

Because they often lack a thick safety net, many young people aging out foster care rely heavily on keeping a job to sustain themselves. Many current or former foster youth work hard to earn a living, but they are often responsible for covering more of their own costs, and are likely to earn lower wages than their peers. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) supports working adults with lower incomes, but only beginning at age 25. Young adults, especially youth who have experienced foster care, would benefit greatly from the EITC, but they are ineligible to receive it during critical years for building and maintaining stability.

For those attending college, the Fostering Futures Scholarship (FFS) helps youth who spent time in foster care due to abuse and/or neglect after their 13th birthday with the stressful transition to a new learning environment by providing them a scholarship for tuition to a Michigan postsecondary program, room and board, and books and supplies. FFS helps these students get on the same playing field as students whose families can support them. Last year, nearly 400 young Michiganders received the FFS.

Fewer than 60 percent of young adults who have experienced foster care report having stable housing, a much lower rates of homelessness than their peers. Michigan's runaway and homeless youth provide crisis and transition services for young people who experiencing homelessness.

Recommendations

1. Expand current funds for MYOI by \$2 million to ensure full programming at every site around the state.
2. Expand the Michigan EITC for young people who have experienced foster care by lowering the minimum age to 16 and basing the credit on what would be available through the federal and state EITC combined if the current age threshold of 25 was met.
3. Double the existing \$750,000 in funds for the Fostering Futures Scholarship.
4. Increase Runaway and Homeless Youth Services by \$1 million