



## **Transition Age Youth Paper**

### **Transition Age Youth Background:**

An estimated 24,000 youth “age out” of the foster care system each year and approximately another 100,000 are released from secure and residential facilities. At age 18, these youths, many with a history of interrupted education, abuse, neglect, mental and behavioral health problems, substance abuse and a host of other previous life traumas, are expected to live independently. Many do not have stable families they can turn to for emotional or financial support. Not surprisingly, outcomes across numerous indicators for these young people are poor.

- Unemployment and poverty-level wages are rampant among youth aging out of foster care and leaving incarceration.
- Youth aging out of foster care have very high rates of pregnancy and child bearing. Reliance on social services is also extremely common among this population.
- Up to one-third of youth transitioning from foster care experience homelessness and three in ten homeless adults have had experience in the foster care system.
- Youth transitioning from out-of-home placements experience high rates of involvement in the criminal justice system.
- Over half of the youth exiting secure detention facilities in the juvenile justice system with no aftercare recidivate.

### **Purpose of the Paper:**

- To bring new and renewed attention to the many complex issues surrounding transition age youth aging out of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and the difficulties they encounter
- To focus attention on the deficiencies in services available to these young people and the resulting harm to them and their communities.
- To examine the services currently available to these individuals and the adequacy or inadequacy of these supports, as well as promising and/or potential model programs that currently exist.
- To consider and/or develop policy reforms at the federal, state, and local levels to provide continued supports and aftercare for youth leaving the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system aimed at improving outcomes for these young people and their families.
- To consider these issues from a multi-systems perspective, reflecting on ways in which more cross-systems cooperation and a more integrated and holistic approach to aftercare planning and service delivery could enhance the likelihood that these youth and families will receive all appropriate supports.

This paper will focus attention on the need for services to transition age youth and highlight the public policy implications. The issues surrounding these vulnerable populations present both an important challenge for better integrating systems and a lens through which to view the parallels between child welfare and juvenile justice. In order to improve outcomes, it is important that the child welfare, juvenile justice, and related systems work more closely together to strengthen the supports and improve the services available, and the delivery of these services, to youth who are often known to both systems. The policy objective must be that post transition planning and increased supports are necessary to help these youth become productive and self-sufficient members of adult society.

**Dissemination Strategy:** The paper and commentary will be released at a symposium held in late April at Georgetown University and disseminated nationally.