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# Working With Youth to Develop a Transition Plan

In an effort to improve outcomes for youth exiting foster care, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 included planning provisions to help youth better transition to independent living and adulthood.

This factsheet is intended to help child welfare professionals and others who work with transitioning youth to understand the Federal legislative requirements for transition plans and partner with youth to develop a plan that builds on their strengths while supporting their needs.

## What's Inside:

- What is a transition plan?
- What are the Federal legislative requirements for transition plans?
- What should transition plans include?
- What are States doing?



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**Child Welfare Information Gateway**  
Children's Bureau/ACYF  
1250 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Eighth Floor  
Washington, DC 20024  
800.394.3366  
Email: [info@childwelfare.gov](mailto:info@childwelfare.gov)  
<https://www.childwelfare.gov>

## What Is a Transition Plan?

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 created the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) that allowed States to provide financial, housing, employment, education, and other support services to youth who left foster care at 18 but had yet to turn 21. The Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001 amended the Chafee Program to extend support services to youth to age 23 if the youth is enrolled in a program of higher education. The act also created the Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) program that provides annual stipends of up to \$5,000 for education-related expenses. The Fostering Connections Act built on this foundation and permitted States to allow youth who aged out of foster care at 18 but are younger than age 21 to remain in or return to foster care, so long as they are enrolled in school, are employed for at least 80 hours each month, or are participating in programs to attain gainful employment (American Bar Association [ABA], 2011). Fostering Connections also included the following transition plan requirement:

“during the 90-day period immediately prior to the date on which the child will attain 18 years of age, or such greater age as the State may elect under paragraph (8)(B)(iii), whether during that period foster care maintenance payments are being made on the child’s behalf or the child is receiving benefits or services under section 477, a caseworker on the staff of the State agency, and, as appropriate, other representatives of the child provide the child with assistance and support in developing a transition plan that is personalized at the direction of the child, includes specific options on housing, health insurance, education, local opportunities for mentors and continuing support services, and work force supports and employment services, and is as detailed as the child may elect” (P.L. 110-351, title II, § 202(3))

Information about the CFCIP, Fostering Connections, facts and statistics about youth transitioning from foster care, and other resources are available on the website of the National Resource Center for Youth Development (NRCYD):  
<http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/>

**DEFINITIONS:**

**A Transition Plan** is required by the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 for each youth exiting foster care. Ninety days prior to a youth's 18th birthday (or the age required by the State for aging out of care), the youth, his or her caseworker, and other representatives of the youth's choosing must develop the plan. Specific elements such as housing, education, employment, mentoring, and continued support services must be included. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act amended the transition plan provision to require that youth be educated about the importance of designating someone who can, when necessary, make health care decisions on their behalf. Transition plans must be *personalized at the direction of the child*.

**Independent Living (IL)** services are provided to youth in out-of-home-care to help them prepare for self-sufficiency. Services often include assistance with money management skills, educational assistance, household management skills, employment preparation, and other services. For more information on IL services and resources, visit the Child Welfare Information Gateway website: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/outofhome/independent/>

## What Are the Federal Legislative Requirements for Transition Plans?

The Fostering Connections Act provides practitioners in the field with a concrete timeframe and formal structure for transition planning. The transition plan must be finalized no later than 90 days prior to the youth's transition from care. Although the legislation is not overly prescriptive, it gives clear guidance on benchmark elements that, when combined with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) requirements, create a solid foundation for meeting youth needs. The most challenging, yet critical, element of the Fostering Connections Act is the provision that each plan should be "as detailed as the child may elect." This requirement shifts the focus for child welfare workers to educating and supporting youth in planning for themselves. In addition, the transition plan requirement creates an opportunity to bring together, in one structured conversation and process, several new requirements for working with youth, including ACA's health care proxy requirement, IL conditions, and more.

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) issued a Program Instruction (PI) in 2010 on the Fostering Connections Act to provide guidance and reiterate other requirements for planning. For example:

- Case plans must include a written or recorded description of the programs and services available to help youth in foster care, who are 16 or older, prepare for the transition from care.
- Permanency hearings for youth 16 or older must determine the necessary services to help him or her transition from foster care to independent living.

The complete PI is available on the ACF website: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/pi1011>

The National Foster Care Coalition published a Q&A paper on the Fostering Connections Act that tackles several questions pertaining to transition plans. The document asks and answers important questions about such topics as how States should engage youth in the development of the personalized transition plan, what role the court plays in transition planning, and more.

*Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, Frequently Asked Questions on the Provisions Designed to Impact Youth and Young Adults* is available on the ABA website: [http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/center\\_on\\_children\\_and\\_the\\_law/empowerment/nfcc\\_faq\\_older youth.authcheckdam.pdf](http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/center_on_children_and_the_law/empowerment/nfcc_faq_older youth.authcheckdam.pdf)

The July 2011 issue of the *Judge's Page*, a National CASA Association newsletter, spotlights the Fostering Connections Act. One article focuses specifically on the transition plan requirement and the role the courts play in implementation. The entire issue is available here: [http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c.mtJSJ7MPIsE/b.7522045/k.DD83/July\\_2011.htm](http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c.mtJSJ7MPIsE/b.7522045/k.DD83/July_2011.htm)

For more information on Fostering Connections and other child welfare legislation, read

Information Gateway's *Major Federal Legislation Concerned With Child Protection, Child Welfare, and Adoption*: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/otherpubs/majorfedlegis.pdf>

## NATIONAL YOUTH IN TRANSITION DATABASE

The CFCIP required that the Children's Bureau establish a system to track the services States provide to youth currently and formerly in foster care, as well as collect outcomes data that could be used to assess State performance in providing services. Thus, the Children's Bureau developed the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD).

Every May and November, States report data to NYTD about the demographics of youth served by CFCIP and information about the services provided. The National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (NRC-CWDT) and the NRCYD provide technical assistance to help States with data collection, reporting, and other NYTD data elements and requirements.

The [NRC-CWDT website](#) provides several NYTD materials, including factsheets, training and technical assistance briefs, State examples, and Federal guidance resources. The Children's Bureau's [NYTD Community of Practice](#) is an information-sharing website for States that is focused on NYTD implementation.

For more information on NYTD, visit the Children's Bureau website: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/research-data-technology/reporting-systems/nytd>

## What Should Transition Plans Include?

The Fostering Connections Act provides a general list of elements that must be included in transition plans, such as housing, employment, mentoring services, and education. How these specific components are covered or addressed can vary by State and even by agency.

FosterClub's *Transition Toolkit* provides youth with a step-by-step process for thinking about leaving care and provides transition plan templates. The guide is centered on 10 critical areas: finances, employment, life skills, identity, permanence, education, health, housing, transportation, and community. The toolkit is available on Foster Club's website: [http://www.fosterclub.com/files/transition\\_toolkit\\_v3.pdf](http://www.fosterclub.com/files/transition_toolkit_v3.pdf)

Foster Club also produced *Transition Toolkit Companion Tools* for professionals working with transitioning youth. The toolkit for professionals includes guidance on asset mapping, an assessment tool to evaluate needed services, and worksheets for youth, each centered on a component of the transition plan. The worksheets also provide a readiness scale to help professionals and youth evaluate his or her readiness on each component and areas for improvement. Access the toolkit companion tools here: <http://www.fosterclub.com/transition/article/transition-toolkit-companion-tools>

The NRCYD produced a literature review of transition planning practices. The literature review provides recommendations for transition

planning across several fields, including child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, and special education. It also includes promising practices in States. *Transition Planning With Adolescents: A Review of Principles and Practices Across Systems* is available on the NRCYD's website: <http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/publication-db/documents/transition-planning-with-adolescents.pdf>

While it is not a Federal legal requirement, transition plans should ensure the collection of important documentation and paperwork that all young adults need, including birth certificates, Social Security cards, credit reports, and more. A list of 15 recommended documents is available in the ABA's publication *Sample State Legislation to Extend Foster Care, Adoption and Guardianship Protections, Services and Payments to Young Adults Age 18 and Older* (page 32) [http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/center\\_on\\_children\\_and\\_the\\_law/empowerment/sample\\_leg\\_18\\_with\\_cover\\_final.authcheckdam.pdf](http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/center_on_children_and_the_law/empowerment/sample_leg_18_with_cover_final.authcheckdam.pdf)

## What Are States Doing?

Before the passage of Fostering Connections in 2008, many States required transitional or independent living plans for youth in out-of-home care who were 16 or older. Child Welfare Information Gateway's State Guides and Manuals database provides links to State publications regarding child welfare services and guidance for professionals: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/sgm/>

A number of States have developed resources to address the requirement for transition plans. The following are a few readily available examples:

- In **Hawaii**, EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.—the State's lead agency for the national Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative—employs the Ohana Circles program, a culturally appropriate program for working with youth to develop their transition plan. Youth who are preparing to leave foster care identify members of their Circle, who come together to help plan for housing, education, employment, physical and mental health, and other needs. A summary of the Circle and transition plan is provided to the youth and Circle participants after the Circle. More information is available on the 'Ohana, Inc. website: <http://www.epicohana.info/youthcircle.aspx>
- **Minnesota's** Department of Human Services produced a best practices guide for child welfare professionals to help youth transition from out-of-home care to adulthood. The guide provides sample goals and objectives for an Independent Living plan, guidance and resources, curricula information, and information on how caregivers can help youth transition to independent living. *Helping Youth Transition From Out-of-Home Care to Adulthood* is available here: [http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/Programs\\_Services/Youth\\_Services/Shared\\_Youth\\_Vision/Inter-Agency\\_Projects/Transition\\_Services\\_Best\\_Practices.pdf](http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/Programs_Services/Youth_Services/Shared_Youth_Vision/Inter-Agency_Projects/Transition_Services_Best_Practices.pdf)
- **Iowa** has a Transition Planning Specialist (TPS) in each of its five regions. The TPS provides training and technical assistance to staff, providers, and others on transition planning and resources. Each youth referred to a TPS are provided with a Transitioning Information Packet with tips on education, housing, money management, and more to help them plan for their transition to independent living. More information on Iowa's TPS, information packet, and other resources is available on Iowa's Department of Human Services website: [http://www.dhs.iowa.gov/Consumers/Child\\_Welfare/Transition\\_Services/Transitioning%20to%20Adulthood.html](http://www.dhs.iowa.gov/Consumers/Child_Welfare/Transition_Services/Transitioning%20to%20Adulthood.html)
- **Texas** requires a transition plan for all youth 14-years-old and older in out-of-home care. The State revised this requirement after Fostering Connections to include a transition meeting 90 days prior to the youth's 18th birthday and 90 days prior to the youth's transition from care. View Texas's Preparation for Adult Living program and other transitional living services here: [http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/CPS/Files/CPS\\_pg\\_x10200.jsp](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/CPS/Files/CPS_pg_x10200.jsp)
- **Oregon's** Department of Human Services' (DHS) *Youth Transitions Policy* provides clear guidelines and requirements for transition plans and the roles and responsibilities caseworkers and supervisors must play in the development of the plan. The policy also outlines steps for reviewing the plan, as well as benchmarks. The policy is available on the State's DHS website: [http://www.dhs.state.or.us/policy/childwelfare/manual\\_1/i-b235.pdf](http://www.dhs.state.or.us/policy/childwelfare/manual_1/i-b235.pdf)
- The **California** Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) provides training resources on transition plans. One resource is geared toward supervisors and managers, and the other resource is intended for child welfare workers: <http://calswec.berkeley.edu/training-resource-transitional-independent-living-plan>

- **Indiana's** The Villages (the State's largest not-for-profit child and family services agency) offers community-based, life-skills training and other services to transitioning youth. Youth have access to scattered-site apartments and 24-hour case management, and many participants qualify for 6 months of support after completing the program: [http://www.villages.org/transitional\\_living.php](http://www.villages.org/transitional_living.php)
- **Washington State** created a youth-friendly website detailing the elements of its Independent Living Program, eligibility requirements, and contact information: <http://www.independence.wa.gov/programs/ilp.asp>

For more promising practices from States and Tribes, in addition to training and technical assistance resources, evidence-based practices, and more, visit the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connection's website: [http://www.nrcpfc.org/fostering\\_connections/emancipating\\_older\\_youth.html](http://www.nrcpfc.org/fostering_connections/emancipating_older_youth.html)

Information Gateway's State statutes database links to State laws on a variety of relevant topics: [https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/state/](https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/state/)

## Additional Resources

- FosteringConnections.org provides a bevy of resources and materials related to the Fostering Connections Act. Its Implementation News and Resources page provides State-specific information: <http://www.fosteringconnections.org/>
- The NRCYD provides several resources on transitioning youth, including The Solutions Desk's information-sharing community, the Fostering Connections section with plain language explanations of the law's provisions, and strategies and materials for engaging youth: <http://www.solutionsdesk.ou.edu/transitioning-youth.html>
- *Strategies from the California Connected by 25 Initiative: Tips and Resources to Improve Outcomes for Transition Age Foster Youth* provides key strategies for community partnerships, youth engagement, and evaluation across five core focus areas: <http://74.81.204.52/Files/CC25IPromisingStrategies.pdf>
- The Center for Juvenile Justice Reform and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative published *Supporting Youth in Transition to Adulthood: Lessons Learned from Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice*. The publication addresses the many challenges the two systems face in preparing youth for adulthood: <http://cjjr.georgetown.edu/pdfs/TransitionPaperFinal.pdf>
- Foster Club's Leaving Foster Care webpage provides several FAQs aimed at transitioning youth: <http://www.fosterclub.com/questionsanswers/leaving-foster-care>
- *FLUX: Life After Foster Care* is a book that includes contributions from more than 100 alumni of foster care. The book examines the emotional transition from foster care to adulthood and serves as a resource for both foster care alumni and social workers: <http://www.fostercarealumni.org/resources/FLUX.htm>

- The National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators, in partnership with Casey Family Programs, administered the Fostering Connections Implementation State Survey to all 50 States and the District of Columbia. Responses provide State-specific information regarding the implementation of the Federal legislation, including information States' Independent Living plans: <http://www.napcwa.org/Legislative/fostering.asp>

## References

American Bar Association. (2011). The option to extend care beyond age 18: An important opportunity for States. *Judge's Page* retrieved from [http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c.mtJSJ7MPlsE/b.7522097/k.CB71/JP6\\_ABA.htm](http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c.mtJSJ7MPlsE/b.7522097/k.CB71/JP6_ABA.htm)



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