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Aging Out of Foster Care

Many teens look forward to becoming an adult so they can move out and do whatever they desire without having to answer to anyone. It is something we look forward to as teens when we are sick of house rules, chores, and curfew, not knowing how hard it is when we finally have to support ourselves. In many situations, teens have support from their family as they emerge into adulthood, whether they are successful or not, they have their parents to fall back on. For example, if the child cannot make rent, moving back home is an option. What happens in other situations if a teen does not have family support? For example, teens that have aged out of foster care do not have the same support and options as other teens when they transition to adult living. Teens aging out of foster care lose all benefits and support, forcing them to face adulthood alone with scarce availability to resources that will promote successful adolescence and prevent negative results such as homelessness.

What can be done to prevent homelessness for youth aged out of foster care systems? As numbers of youth in foster care increase, the numbers of homelessness, substance abuse, and criminal activity increase in young adults as well. When teens age out of foster care at the age of 18, they are cut off from medical benefits, monthly

allowances, therapy, and a home to live in; along with other support systems, they may receive (Rowe, 2013). Such loss forces youth to provide for themselves with no prior background or knowledge of effective survival skills because without it, there is little hope for them to be successful without facing harsh realities of unemployment and homelessness.

Today, there are almost no resources available to youth aging out of foster care, which is having a negative impact on their success surviving on their own. According to Kimberly Tyler's "Foster Care Placement, Poor Parenting, and Negative Outcomes among Homeless Young Adults" she explains, "The daily struggles that homeless individuals experience such as finding food makes the situation of homelessness another unique circumstance. Homeless youth encounter a variety of stressors, such as housing instability, negative caretaker interactions, and child maltreatment." The problem we face with this is these youth are adding to our increasing numbers in people suffering from poverty in the struggling economy. We need to find new ways of providing these youth with programs that will support them to earn degrees and strive in their careers, by doing so it will later have a positive effect on the economy as the youth will give back when they reach adulthood. Youth today are the next generation of our future in society, and in order to see a change, we need to make adjustments.

However, so far there are limited resources available to youth with no family, and aging out of foster care. Therefore, these youth are growing up and increasing our numbers of poverty and crime, as they cope with the stress tied to independent duties in adulthood yet has no experience and no examples from successful adults as they are raised in instable circumstances. According to Claudia Rowe, "Former foster youth have

off-the-charts rates of homelessness and post-traumatic stress. They end up in jail, prison, or hospital emergency rooms far more frequently than other teens their age. Many depend on welfare and food stamps. Most never attend college.” On the other hand, children raised by their biological families are taught and exposed to skills that would later advance them toward successful independence.

Staggering increases in numbers of homeless, unemployed, incarcerated, and pregnant youth has dramatically affected our economy. Children’s Rights “Facts about Aging Out” provides percentages of the later results of young adults who have aged out of foster care without a permanent family. The facts show, “12-30% homeless, 40-63% did not complete high school, 25-55% unemployed, 30-62% struggled with lack of healthcare, 32-40% receive public assistance, 50% face extreme financial hardship, 31-42% arrested, 40-60% of young woman were pregnant within 12-18 months of leaving foster care.”

As a former foster child who has aged out, I have seen these results occur in every case, and had little to no faith of success, as I knew I would be completely on my own at the age of 18. I knew of no resources to provide me with the skills I needed, so I began to hunt for solutions and options available at the age of 16, as I was scared to become another statistical case. I found little to no resources over the two years of my research and hard work except for two programs in which I had to wait on a list in order to go through the obstacles for acceptance. The first program I discovered and was accepted in was the “YES program” Youth Employability Services, which is now known as the WIA program ran by the Department of Workforce Services. This program is geared toward providing educational support, financial support for unexpected emergencies like

transportation needs, workshops for youth, educating them in skills such as budgeting, work ethic, cooking, and many other skills needed in adulthood. The second resource I discovered was the TAL, Transition to Adult Living scholarship. This scholarship is only available to twelve young adults out of the hundreds whom apply. Fortunately, I was accepted into both organizations although there was a slim possibility. Yet, I myself am still struggling with similar situations as other youth who have aged out.

However, in the majority of similar cases to mine, young adults aging out of foster care are far less fortunate, which is why I feel there needs to be an increase of federal aid and taxpayer monies to fund more programs that can help a large amount of these youth. This will provide them with more opportunity to become successful independents. Many may disagree with this solution due to the amount of taxes and federal money such programs will need as we are in a declining economy. Although this is true, and the results may not be immediate, this will benefit the economy by decreasing the numbers of individuals in poverty and reduce the amounts of money given to people on food stamps and unemployment. Such a solution will gear toward outweighing the problem for future youth aging out of foster care.

As we sit back and find ways to better the economy, we are not considering the circumstances, needs, and staggering increases in the numbers of homeless, unemployed, incarcerated, and pregnant youth in today's generation, as well as the next generations who will be the result of what our society becomes. Today we are promoting unsuccessful futures for these young adults because we are not providing the adequate resources to change the increasing numbers of homelessness, substance abuse, and criminal activity involved in these young adults near future. Which is why I am in favor

of the society providing more support to teens aging out of foster care instead of providing them with temporary benefits and revoking them when they turn 18. This revocation of services forces them to face adulthood alone with scarce availability to resources that would promote successful adolescence and prevent negative results such as homelessness.

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